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61st year of publication

Climate change, Kyoto and other calamities

Harry der Nederlanden

Yes, the weather has been changing. Scientists are agreed on that, and the latest study that summarizes research over the last three years concludes that most of the warming over the last 50 years or so has been caused by human activity, that is, primarily by burning fossil fuels which release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The additional "greenhouse gases" slow heat loss from the earth's atmosphere, causing the earth to gradually become warmer. The U.N. sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, consisting of some 2,500 scientists from around the world, gave us little information that we haven't heard already, but its measured, careful presentation leaves little room for doubt. Science, however, does not deal in absolute certainties so there will still be plenty of doubters.

The media introduced the new report with its usual sensationalism and disaster scenarios, but the report itself is not shrill and does not focus on extremes. In fact, the report that is before the public now is a short summary of findings for policy makers. The scientific part of the report amounts to thousands of pages and will be released in parts over the year ahead. Some critics make much of the fact that the extrapolations from the science are therefore the product of negotiations among interpreters of the data and so a product of compromise, but although one may quibble over details, the message is clear: if human beings keep on producing greenhouse gases at the present rate, we are in for a mess of trouble.

In fact, we are in for some drastic changes no matter what. Even heroic efforts to curb production of CO₂ (carbon dioxide) will not reverse the processes of global warming now underway, at least not for hundreds



of years. Many contributors to the report worry that this bit of bad news will cause people to throw up their hands in despair that it's too late. They stress that although we cannot stop and reverse the process in the near future, we can certainly mitigate its effects. The effects do not have to be disastrous – if people and governments act now.

Nevertheless, we will see a gradual rise in temperatures between 1.8-4 degrees C. That does not sound like much, especially in our northern climate. But it will cause more extreme weather – more drought in some places and fierce rainstorms in other places. Ocean levels, which have already been rising a couple of mm per year, will begin to rise more quickly. Projections are that they will rise anywhere between 18 and 59 cm by the year 2100 – and that does not include the possible meltdown of the arctic. So low-lying coastal areas are certainly threatened by global warming (no predictions of giant tidal waves, however).

Many of us have been global warming sceptics in the past – for good reason. Although this process is now said to have been gradually accelerating ever since the industrial revolution of the 19th century, we recall the predictions of a global ice age that climate scientists issued in the mid 1970s. But climate science has come a long way since then, greatly aided by computer

models that allegedly track the effects of numerous processes. These programs are by no means infallible, and statisticians can't be sure how accurate projections several decades into the future will be. But they are much better than they used to be.

Whatever the uncertainties involved, there is no doubt that our consumption patterns have to be changed pretty drastically and that we need cleaner forms of energy. Global warming isn't the only cloud on the horizon: fossil fuels are a limited resource; they produce other forms of pollution as well; and present levels of consumption in the northern hemisphere are corrosive to society and to the human spirit. The pollution is not only environmental; it is spiritual.

Kyoto and indulgences

That said, does it mean we must jump aboard every movement waving the environmental banner? Should we send letters to P.M. Harper admonishing him to live up to the Kyoto Protocol? On the day before I wrote this, the opposition parties passed a non-binding resolution calling on the Conservative government to meet Canada's Kyoto Protocol obligations. A *Globe and Mail* editorial complained that "Stéphane Dion is advocating an exercise in futility."

No doubt this may be clever politics. Recent polls show that

climate change is very much in the forefront of Canadian's minds, and they are ready to get behind a tough approach to the issue. So affirming Kyoto sounds as if we really mean business. However, Kyoto commits us to reducing our CO₂ emissions to 6 percent below 1991 levels. But in the nearly 10 years since signing the agreement we have done little or nothing to reduce them, and they have grown steadily year by year until now Canada is almost 35 percent over. To keep our Kyoto commitment, we would have to suddenly be able to do in 5 years 6 times as much as Liberal governments were unable to do in 10. That makes the parliamentary resolution look like political hocus-pocus.

"There is no way, short of an economic disaster, that the nation can meet its treaty obligation to slash greenhouse-gas emissions to 6 percent below 1991 levels in the period from 2008 to 2012," concludes the *Globe and Mail* editorial.

You may have heard something about carbon trading in connection with Kyoto. The negotiators for Kyoto came up with a clever mechanism to encourage countries and corporations to reduce green-house gases by a system of incentives and payments. It is an inverted free enterprise system applied to environmental policing. It has been compared to the selling of indulgences in the Middle Ages, the system that Martin Luther

railed against. The offenders have to pay for their "transgressions" of their Kyoto limits. No, the money doesn't go to the Church this time; instead it goes to those countries who have met or exceeded their goals – to the CO₂ "saints" as it were (to those who have stored up credits in Kyoto heaven).

So theoretically a country with money to burn could go on sinning – belching CO₂ into the atmosphere – and buying credits from countries like Russia, Britain, Eastern Europe and Japan. Have these countries been especially virtuous and found a corporate discipline to reduce greenhouse gases? Not especially.

It is largely due to the accident of timing. When the measures were set in 1991, it was just before a major downturn in the economy of Russia and Eastern Europe. A large number of heavily polluting factories were shut down. Economic failure looks good from an environmental point of view. As Terence Corcoran points out in *The National Post*, Mexico gets a much higher rating for environmental responsibility than Canada from the Suzuki Foundation. Has Mexico really excelled in its environmental policies? No, but economies with low growth which provide a dismal standard of living look good because people can't afford cars or fuel. Canada ranks 28 to Mexico's number 2 on the Suzuki scale. If Canada's economy crashed and half the population died, we'd shoot right up to numero uno.

That's not to say that rating countries according to CO₂ output per capita is wrong; it's just a reminder that we cannot become so focused on one measure that we lose sight of the whole picture. On the other hand, it is certainly not true that the more we consume and the more fossil fuel we use up, the happier we will be.

Continued on page 2...

News

Brisk recovery in Pakistan's quake zone

More than a year after a powerful tremor killed 73,000, the disaster has brought about social change.

David Montero

ALLAI VALLEY, PAKISTAN—The brisk sale of nails and iron sheeting is more of a silver lining than Anwal Faroze could have asked for. His small hardware shop, sitting in one of the most remote valleys in Pakistan's earthquake zone, sells more supplies now than ever before in 16 years of business.

"There is more need now. People are busy reconstructing," says Mr. Faroze, his bushy beard underscoring a bright smile.

His revival is symbolic of the nation's recovery more than a year and nearly two frigid winters after a devastating earthquake killed 73,000 people in one of the worst natural disasters in human history.

But as Faroze's shop attests, progress cannot be measured in the brick and mortar of reconstruction alone. There are other encouraging signs in this destitute valley: Local organizations and relief agencies are picking up where the military and international relief organizations—both now considerably diminished—have left off. Old social and economic mechanisms have sprung back to life, and new, transformative processes brought by the outside world—whether in attitudes toward women or livelihoods—have taken on a life of their own, nurtured by locals intent not only on recuperation, but progress.

The earthquake destroyed more than 200,000 homes—some 10,000 here in Allai Valley alone—in an area twice the size of Connecticut, leaving more than 3 million homeless in Kashmir and the North West Frontier Province. When the Himalayan winter came last year with brutal force, some 600,000 people huddled in hurriedly made tent camps. Now winter has come again, but this time, only 30,000 people are left in camps, according to the International Organization on Migration (IOM).

Not that the challenge is over. Few homes are completely reconstructed, meaning that nearly 2 million will face the second winter in temporary shelters, according to an assessment by Oxfam International.

"This is what we wanted—that the

communities take charge of their lives," says Lt. Gen. Ahmed Nadeem, Deputy Director of the government's Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA). "I already see signs that they're turning this adversity into an opportunity."

Determination is evident in the cramped office of Zahid Amin, chairman of the Development Authority of Muzaffarabad, the capital of Kashmir. The office lay in ruins after the earthquake, which killed some 30,000 people in the district. But in December, Mr. Amin led a team of international aid group officials and the military to assess shelters in the city, identifying nearly 3,000 families still living in tents. The results were troubling, but the fact that Amin's people could marshal such an assessment at all shows local government is bouncing back, observers say.

"This is a great test. Here you have the development authority going ahead with a survey..." says John Sampson, head of IOM's office in Muzaffarabad.

Still, identifying homelessness is one matter—providing assistance is another. Most observers agree it will be months before local civil administrations can function on their own. In the meantime, a web of international and local organizations will work together with hobbled administrators and the military. But there will be holes.

Saeem Muhammad Kiani is one of those who slipped through. More than a year after the earthquake, he and his community of 35 families still live in tents in Chella Bandi, a Muzaffarabad enclave. The earthquake sent their ancestral homes tumbling down a hillside, leaving behind violently churned bits of cement and dirt.

"Due to the winter, most of our children are already sick," says Mr. Kiani, who must wait for the government to identify new land where his community can rebuild.

In the second winter, this is one of the small pictures of worry in the otherwise large picture of encouragement, says Andrew Macleod,

Anwal Faroze, far right, stands behind the counter at his hardware shop in the bazaar in Allai Valley. Shops like Faroze's have recently come back to life in the earthquake-affected area of Northern Pakistan, signaling the beginning of an economic renaissance in the area.

the relief-to-recovery transition adviser to the United Nations resident coordinator and to the deputy director of ERRA.

Even in valleys as remote as Allai—where more than 2,000 died among a population of 148,000—most survivors have received disaster aid from the government to rebuild. A cash infusion of roughly \$1,600 so far per family has reached 475,000 of the 600,000 households affected, totaling almost \$500 million. The government estimates that about \$1 billion has already been spent on relief and rehabilitation.

This winter will be cold, but no crises are expected. Survivors are well-stocked with blankets, quilts, and winter clothes, observers say. Save the Children USA is handing out more than 4,500 winter kits for children in Allai, complementing 25,000 corrugated galvanized iron sheets the Army sent for shelters. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is airlifting shelter and relief supplies, including 40,000 quilts, to almost 100,000 people throughout the area.

"This was the biggest natural disaster response in the history of humanity. What we've seen in the last 12 months will be seen as one of the best models of early recovery," says Mr. Macleod.

As money and relief has flowed, so too has other progress not easily captured by the metric of dollars. For months inside a small



tent in Allai, Farha Deeba, a soft-spoken woman in a hijab, has trained 22 village women in sewing, gardening, and other skill sets, under the auspices of Save the Children USA. Women have never worked in this area, except occasionally in the fields. Until recently, most were confined to their homes by strict religious mores. But once trained, many of the women have taken it upon themselves to spread the word and encourage others.

"They discuss it among themselves at social functions. When other women know, they demand [to be trained]. It is spreading day by day," says Ms. Deeba, a livelihood officer for Save the Children USA.

Now that the worst is over in Pakistan's earthquake zone, observers say, one of the major remaining challenges will be to generate sustainable livelihoods in an area that is among the poorest in Pakistan. To that end, the government has already trained 100,000 people in various disciplines such as masonry and plumbing.

In a shop above Allai's bazaar, Delawar Khan may have a leg up: He has started selling mobile phones, which only recently became available here. About 250 people come to his shop every day, Mr. Khan says. There's only one problem: So many people are making calls now that the network is always jammed.

Kyoto... continued

Under Kyoto's provisions Canada will be paying millions per year to other countries, according to Aldyen Donnelly of the Greenhouse Emissions Management Consortium. If it does not buy enough credits, it will end up facing trade sanctions—more payments going abroad. That certainly does put pressure on Kyoto signatories to shape up. At the same time, however, by draining money out of the country it inhibits the ability to clean up its industries and to compete. It would be ironic if Kyoto ended up crippling a country's ability to upgrade its technology, and it is doubtful that a poorer Canada will be more environmentally responsible—unless, of course, we're forced to trade in our automobiles for burros.

Remember, too, that some of the biggest countries with the highest rate of growth are

not part of Kyoto. International corporations always have the option of moving their manufacturing operations to countries that are not signatories. That would look good on paper, but moving operations to countries with lower environmental standards and with less power or incentive to enforce them will do nothing to fight global warming.

Kyoto has become something of a sacred cow—and like India's sacred cows, to continue to do obeisance to it will only impede our way to a better future. But the alternative to Kyoto is not inaction or a continued reliance on voluntary cutbacks. Changing your incandescent light bulbs for fluorescent ones will only take you so far, and you can only turn down your thermostat so much without freezing to death.

It is inevitable that our politicians will

make hay with an issue as urgent and dramatic as climate change, especially since the media give it such prominence (rightly—though not always in the right way). John Ibbotson warns that "political pressure corrodes public policy." In his efforts to take on the green mantle, Harper may be tempted to embrace policies that look responsible from a narrow perspective, but "that, in the long run, retards the development of the oil sands, reduces Ontario's manufacturing competitiveness, and lowers the general standard of living, without saving a single glacier."

Stirred to rhetorical action by the climate change report, some politicians joined President Jacques Chirac of France in calling for the issue to be classed as one of our fundamental human rights. And he wants the U.N. to be put in charge of monitoring our

compliance with environmental standards. No doubt it would function a lot like the notorious UN Human Rights Commission.

If the U.N. is put in charge of climate policing, folks, don't waste time—move to higher ground.

But unless we as a national community decide such questions responsibly, make no mistake, those decisions will more and more be taken out of our hands. They have profound collective, international repercussions.



News

In Europe, pushback against US 'war on terror'

Robert Marquand

PARIS – Reaction in Germany was hardly neutral when a prosecutor in Munich indicted 13 CIA officials in the first week of February for kidnapping a German of Lebanese descent and interrogating him in Afghanistan before apparently realizing they had the wrong man. Germans solidly backed the prosecutor.

Since Christian Schmidt-Sommerfeld took the unprecedented step, both the right and left in Germany have supported the "rule of law" principles he articulated.

The media have been unified as well. Typical is the centrist Süddeutsche Zeitung: "The justice system has stood up for the rule of law. Whether the government will do so is a different matter. Berlin must push for the kidnappers to be extradited, or ... tried in the USA. But it is unlikely to have that much courage."

The solidarity underscores a shifting tone in Europe. As changes of leadership loom in Britain and France, and capitals contemplate relations with a post-Bush US, Uncle Sam may expect stronger "pushbacks" from Europe, experts here say. Public disapproval of the US-led "war on terror" is also growing, spurring the change.

"There is a deep gap between government policy and public opinion in Europe, and that opinion may be shaping the direction here right now," says Frederic Bozo, professor of European Studies at the Sorbonne in Paris. "Europe doesn't want to upset the careful balance with the US. I don't think there is a united opposition against the US at all. But Europe is setting the groundwork for its own identity."

Gordon Brown, who is shortly expected to take over as prime minister in Great Britain, opposed the Iraq war from the start, and has made no secret that he plans to carve out an independent line on the venerable "special relationship" with the US. Many anticipate that British troops will leave Iraq by the end of the year.

In France, even the avidly pro-American Nicolas Sarkozy, current front-runner in the French elections this spring, stated in an interview taped in New York last week that Americans need to "get interested in the world, and the world will learn to love you."

To be sure, European cooperation with the US on a wide range of areas, including counterterrorism, is extremely strong, even in France, where the Chirac government has steadily gone it alone in Europe in opposition to the Iraq campaign. Yet Europeans have steadily refused to accept the concept and phrase, "war on terror," a sentiment that extends to its application to Iraq.

In the last week of January, European Union officials in Brussels sought to reduce the amount of information given to US agencies on air passengers leaving Europe. An official in charge of data protection for the European Central Bank similarly advised that millions of pieces of financial information being sent regularly to the US after Sept. 11 were in violation of EU privacy codes.

The "secret, routine, and massive access" by US agencies to banking SWIFT codes – needed to transfer in and out of European financial institutions – is "unacceptable," stated Peter Hustinx, the Brussels official responsible for EU data oversight.

Boosting this sentiment is Europeans' recognition that the US is also in flux with an



election season starting up, and that President Bush's term appears to be winding down with the United States in a vulnerable position overseas.

The US legal basis for conducting interrogation centers at Guantánamo Bay, for example, has long rankled in Europe.

"Most of the French opinion, many of the German people, a large share of the Labor constituency in the UK, the Spanish, and now Italy, don't just oppose the policy, but the basis of US policy," says Georges Le Guelte, of the Institute for International and Strategic Relations in Paris. "You can't have renditions and Guantánamo and talk human rights at the same time. That is more clear to many of us."

In Italy, prosecutors put out warrants several months ago for 25 members of a CIA team that abducted a Muslim cleric in Milan.

Nor is Europe alone in its willingness to speak more pointedly to the White House about its foreign affairs. On page 1 of the People's Daily of Feb. 1, a newspaper of record in China, a Chinese official criticized Mr. Bush for inflammatory rhetoric that turned the war in Iraq into a "religious war."

The comment was unprecedented in a state where official decorum is rigidly maintained. (For nearly a decade, China has conducted a brutal campaign of summary executions of Muslims in its far-west Xinjiang region, as documented in human rights reports.)

In the case of the Munich renditions, announced Jan. 31, 13 American CIA operatives allegedly apprehended German citizen Khaled el-Masri in Macedonia in 2004 and whisked him to an Afghan prison called "the Salt Pit." Realizing he was the wrong man, they left him on a hillside in Albania five months later, warning him never to talk of his experience. Mr. el-Masri instead filed suit in a Virginia court. Masri's case was dropped in Virginia after arguments that a trial would jeopardize US security operations.

But with help from Spanish police, the Munich prosecutors discovered the identity of the operatives through flight and hotel records in Palma de Mallorca, where they stopped to relax.

On Feb. 2, in Washington, German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier told US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that the Munich warrants were only valid in Germany at present, but that Berlin felt the local court might issue an international warrant, according to German papers.

Ms. Rice said the warrants would not harm US-German relations. Justice Department officials have not responded to approaches by the German prosecutors.

Robert Marquand is a staff writer for The Christian Science Monitor

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Editorial

And a little child shall wake them

Harry der Nederlanden

Recently I saw the film *Children of Men* based on the novel by P.D. James, a writer who still has her roots in the Christian tradition. A few days later I also saw on DVD the hilarious comedy *Little Miss Sunshine*. I was struck by how similar – and yet how very different – the two films are. Both are journey films: they tell a story about people trying to get somewhere. Coincidentally, I was also translating the latest chapter in Van Ruler's meditations on Ecclesiastes, which also dwells on the metaphor of travel – of knowing the way to somewhere. Both films made it onto the list of top ten films for 2006 assembled by the Film Critics Awards, so they are highly regarded – by others besides me.

They are fables for our time, each in its own way. Both are about journeys – car chases, in a way – and they are themselves imaginative journeys that take us far from normal everyday life. *Children of Men* takes us into a grim, dystopian future. *Little Miss Sunshine* takes us into the world of a dysfunctional family, but it consists of greatly exaggerated types and operates almost on the level of farce. Yet, both take this detour away from normal, everyday reality to shed a sharp light on that reality. In their departure from the ordinary, in their extremity, they highlight what we might otherwise miss – the fact that there are terrible forces at work in our “normality”. Each film, again in very different ways, has a child at the center, perhaps for similar reasons.

Charles Colson and a few other Christian critics have complained that the film *Children of Men* departs markedly from the book; in fact, he says it turns the book on its head. What was a story resonating with Christian allusions, he grouses, has been turned into something else. I haven't read the novel, but it seemed to me that the film still conveys a look into our world that opens up into the gospel. But I think *Little Miss Sunshine*, although not based on anything written by a Christian, is no less a contemporary fable that opens up into the gospel. God confronts us in the nitty-gritty of things. He confronts all seekers for truth in the nitty-gritty of things, says St. Paul.

Children of Men is set in a not-too-distant future, in a time when civilization and civility have almost completely broken down. Although set in Britain, we are given glimpses of headlines and images that suggest that things

are even worse in other parts of the world. Bad as things are in Britain, with urban landscapes that look like Beirut after the recent clash with Israel, the country is being flooded with starving refugees from other countries.

They are being rounded up everywhere, treated brutally, worse than animals, crammed in cages and in camps for deportation. Now and again we see “fugees” (refugees) begging for food in German, no doubt a deliberate allusion to the Nazi roundups of Jews. In some shots, in the background we see people being stripped in public, another allusion to the death camps.

Colson complained that the introduction of the immigration theme (apparently not in the novel) is an attempt to turn the film into an anti-American tract. But the issue of foreigners and immigrants is hardly unique to America. Near the beginning, the main character Theo Faron (played by Clive Owen) is almost hit by a bomb set off in a nearby café. That reminds us of contemporary Islamist terrorism but also of IRA bombings. Near the end of the film the main characters are caught up in a demonstration that turns into a street battle. We see signs in Arabic and hear chants that evoke the Middle East. So the filmmakers have included allusions to many different situations, past as well as present.

The world of *Children of Men* has dissolved into chaos and near-anarchy. It is kept from disintegrating into a self-destructive war of all against all only by force. Heavily armed soldiers and police are omnipresent, contributing to the violence as much as suppressing it.

When the film opens, we learn that the youngest person in the world has just died. He was 18 years old. For mysterious reasons, no children have been born for the last 18 years, so there is no longer a future for humanity. This is the so-called “culture of death” literalized (the name given to a culture that is aborting future generations) – although the cause of the global sterility is not known.

The journey/chase develops when Theo agrees to help smuggle a refugee, a young woman, out of the country. Although he agrees to do it for money, we are given reason to think other motives may be at work. He is approached by a militant anti-government group (like the Weathermen of the 70s) in which his ex-wife is one of the leaders. Soon the movie in many ways becomes a rather frenetic series of chase sequences, as the main characters are pursued by both the authorities and the rebels, who have betrayed them and attacked by feral gangs living in the woods.

Theo's motives for his involvement change. He finds out that he is serving as the protector of a pregnant woman, the first in 18 years. He is shepherding a miracle, new hope. Theo is now motivated by the painful memory of the death of his own young child. It is out of this wound that something new is born.

There are scenes that are clearly designed to have biblical resonance. Theo learns of the woman's pregnancy in a cowbarn and she jokingly pretends she's a virgin. After the birth of the baby, Theo and the mother and child are caught in a pitched gun battle. When the militias and soldiers hear the crying baby, both sides stop shooting, and there is suddenly a peaceful break in the conflict. It reminded me of a well-known story set in the Second World War, when the shooting temporarily stopped at Christmas. This is, in a sense, a Christmas story.

Colson complained about the “Buddhist chants” in the film. The chant that I heard was “Shantih, shantih, shantih” (peace). It is the closing chant of T. S. Eliot's famous poem “The Wasteland.” Read the poem after seeing the film and you'll see other shared themes – besides that of sterility. *Children of Men* may not be a great film, but it gives food for thought.

Little Miss Sunshine is such a hoot – I laughed till the tears came – that it's easy to miss the fact that something serious is happening amidst the farcical comedy.

We find ourselves in a frantic journey across the U.S. in a malfunctioning Volkswagen bus with a severely dysfunctional family. They are headed for Los Angeles, the city of angels, so 7-year-old Olive (Abigail Breslin) can compete in the Little Miss Sunshine beauty pageant.

The travelers on the pilgrimage to our modern Canterbury are an uncle who has just been released from the mental hospital after having attempted suicide because he was betrayed by his gay lover. Grandpa is a foul-mouthed, heroine-using dirty old man who has been evicted from the retirement home for seducing the ladies. Olive's older brother refuses to speak because he has taken a vow of silence until he achieves his dream of being admitted to the air force academy. As a disciple of Nietzsche, he claims to hate everyone. Father is unemployed, but he is sure that his nine-step formula for success will soon catapult him up there among the self-help gurus and turn him into a millionaire. He spouts an endless stream of clichés about the world consisting of winners and losers – and he, of course, has the formula for turning losers into winners. Mama is counting on it.

In the middle sits pudgy little Olive with her pug nose and huge glasses, always sweet, always upbeat, dreaming of winning the beauty pageant. She is cute as a button, but clearly no beauty. Grandpa adores her and has taken on the duty of training her for her dance routine – which we don't see until the very end.

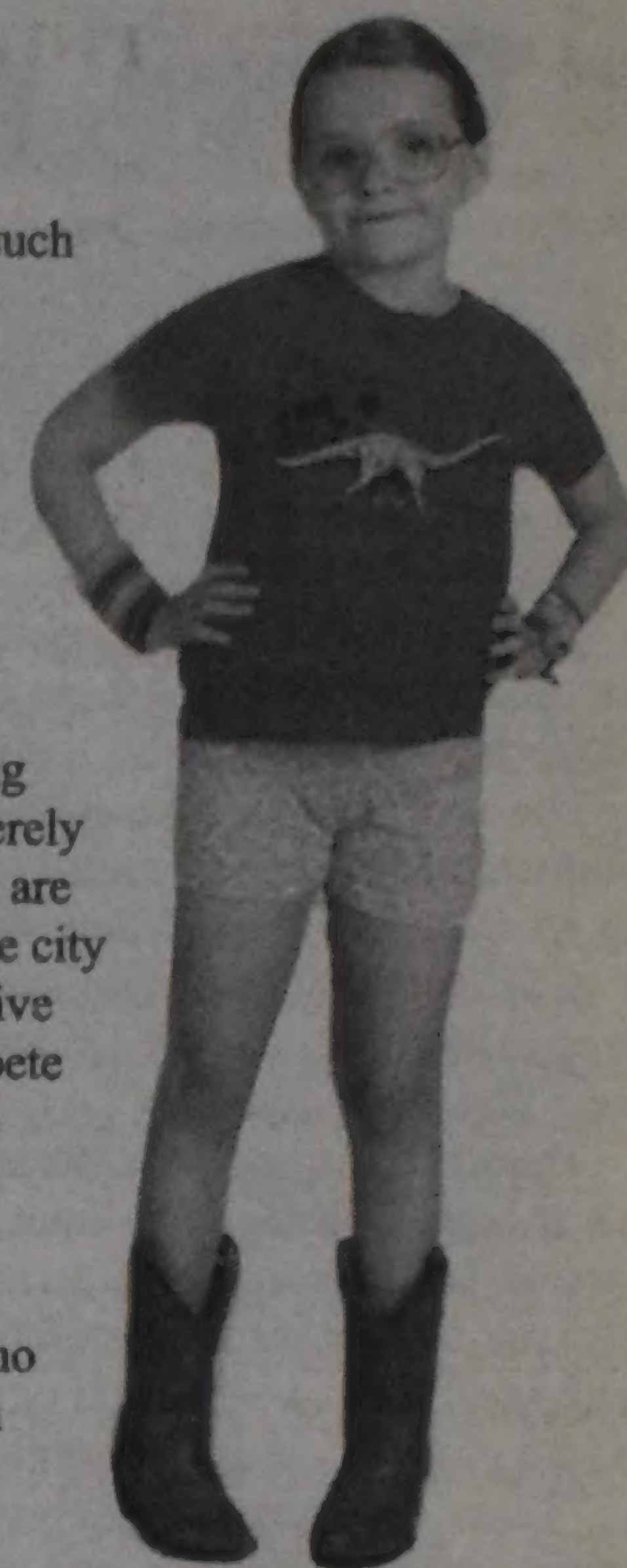
Each character is a one-dimensional stereotype; yet, this over-the-top picture of a dysfunctional family that is mobilized to fulfill little Olive's dream struck me as strangely true-to-life. At any rate, it's a wonderful symbol.

All the characters are wounded, failed or failing human beings, motivated by shallow, unrealistic dreams. We are looking at one-dimensional people (Van Ruler's fools) caught up in the pursuit of flawed, futile dreams. Yet, the fact that they become galvanized by their commitment to a bright-eyed, innocent child seems somehow to redeem them.

When, overcoming all obstacles, they at last arrive at their destination and see what an offense and threat the beauty pageant is to little Olive, the comedy reveals its dark, satiric edge. We are looking into the heart of darkness of a society that happily corrupts its children. But it's too late: we can't stop laughing.

In the midst of this family and this society seduced by false, shallow, optimistic dreams of being winners, the corrupted “innocence” of a moon-faced little child still seems capable of waking the walking dead from their spell.

A warning. Neither of these films are of the Disney variety. They offer food for thought, but also some violence, vulgarity and profanity. Yet, for those with eyes to see, they resonate with gospel.



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Canada

Letters/News

Letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper

Sent by The Committee for Contact with the Government of the Canadian branch of the Christian Reformed Church on February 5, 2007.

Prime Minister:

Canada's mission in Afghanistan raises important questions about the practical implementation and ethical dimensions of our military and foreign policies. The Committee for Contact with the Government (CCG) of the Christian Reformed Churches in Canada recognizes the deep complexity of the situation. We engage these matters with hopes for a constructive dialogue specifically focused on building peace in Afghanistan and more broadly for the development of integrated Canadian international policy.

The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) concluded a landmark study on peace and war in 2006. The study's emphasis on building peace with justice has implications for Canada's actions in Afghanistan and elsewhere. For this reason the CCG would like to discuss some of the findings of the report with you and other policy makers. Please find enclosed: an overview of the findings of the CRCNA Report on War and Peace as they relate to the government of Canada; and a copy of the full report.

First, a brief background note: The CRCNA Report on War and Peace is the product of three years of work by a bi-national team of members from the United States and Canada. The report addresses each national context within a unified set of recommendations. The report is also reflective of the inter-church peace and justice tradition of which it is a part. Specifically in Canada, churches have long called on government and citizens to pursue peace. The Committee for Contact with the Government draws deeply from both the CRCNA bi-national context and from continual ecumenical collaboration in its work on peace and justice. The key finding of the CRCNA report is a call for governments and the Christian community to dedicate more attention to building peace with justice.

As a church with a historical commitment to the ethical framework of just war, this finding represents a conscious effort to witness to the deeper nuances of God's call to peace. While traditional just war criteria remain important for evaluating the rationale and conduct of the military use of force, this report concludes that they are inadequate as a basis for building peace and preventing conflict in the current international context.

In light of the call to build peace with justice, the CCG urges the government to give greater priority to efforts to build peace in Afghanistan. It is encouraging that the Afghanistan Compact, as endorsed by Canada, includes a Peace, Justice, and Reconciliation Action Plan. This plan, developed in consultation with Afghan civil society, is a thoughtful approach to the search for culturally appropriate ways to achieve accountability with forgiveness and reconciliation as a basis for lasting peace, from the local level to national institutions. As the CRCNA Report highlights, this kind of justice and reconciliation is essential for lasting peace. Unfortunately, this plan is not receiving enough attention as part of the Reconstruction of Afghanistan. Prime Minister, we urge you and your government to work for genuine reconciliation by giving greater priority to full implementation of this plan.

A clear Canadian commitment to justice and reconciliation in Afghanistan is also important in the context of prevailing concerns for fragile states and security. Canada's participation in the mission represents an evolution in our international policy that is responsive to this context. The CRCNA Synod has noted that peace is linked to just governance and security. It also suggests that Canada is well positioned to make a particular contribution to peace building. In the context of Afghanistan, Canada's peace building effort requires more clarity on the balance of military security, development and diplomatic elements of the mission. We have noted your government's stated commitment to an integrated approach (3-d and whole of government concepts). At the same time we have noticed that military security is often named as the overarching concern in operations. To shed more light on the principles underlying Canadian operations, the CCG calls for a transparent public discussion on the nature and balance of the mission. This, we submit, would be helpful as Canadians strive to understand their collective commitment to be helpful neighbours and peace-builders alongside the people of Afghanistan.

Prime Minister, in summary we urge your government to work for peace with justice in Afghanistan, in particular through the implementation of the Peace, Justice, and Reconciliation Action Plan for Afghanistan. We wish to be kept informed and contribute to the dialogue on the progress and obstacles regarding this important process. Further, given the significance of Afghanistan for the development of Canadian international policy, we call on you and all Parliamentarians to engage in a transparent dialogue on the nature and balance of the mission. The CCG is committed to persistent reflection and action on God's call to peace. In that spirit we will continue to draw on our Synod's findings and work with other faith communities and civil society to deepen our ethical understanding of, and constructive contribution to Canada's international responsibilities.

We wish you God's blessings in your calling to do justice and serve the people of Canada. Sincerely,

Rev. Bruce Adema, Director of Canadian Ministries Christian Reformed Church
Mike Hogeterp, Research and Communications Coordinator Committee for Contact with the Government

Growing farmer suicide toll shows weak faith, says Indian bishop

Anto Akkara

Meenangady, India, (ENI) – A top church leader in south India has short shrift for the increasing number of suicides by farmers in the mountain Malabar region in Kerala state. It is a "bad witness to Christian faith," says Yuhanon Mor Philoxinos, who heads the Malabar diocese of the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church.

"These [suicides] shows that they are very weak in faith," he said. "Suicide should never be a solution to any Christian or for others," lamented Philoxinos in an interview with Ecumenical News International in his office at Meenangady in the mountain district of Wayanad.

The fertile Wayanad mountains nestle along Kerala's border with Karnataka and Tamil Nadu state and have been making international headlines recently due to the steady increase in suicides by debt-ridden farmers. More than 400 farmers have taken their own lives by consuming pesticides or hanging themselves because they have been unable to pay loans taken from banks and money lenders in recent years.

A detailed study was conducted by the Shreyas social service society of the Sultan Battery diocese of the Catholic Syro-Malankara church into 316 of the suicides between 2002 and June 2006. It found that although the Christian community accounts for one third of Wayanad's 750 000 population, it had a higher suicide rate than the rest of the residents.

Due to losses in agriculture, bad debts from successive droughts and a crash in prices of produce such as pepper, ginger and coffee, farmers in a debt trap take the fatal step when banks serve eviction notices, or creditors threaten legal action.

"Suicide has become an easy option even for Christians to tide over financial problems. But the question is, 'What about their [Christian] faith?'" said Philoxinos.



"The tragedy is that suicide has gained great social acceptability" in Wayanad, where farming accounts for 95 percent of the jobs, the prelate stated.

There is widespread glorification of farmer suicides within the media and by political parties that depict farmers committing suicides as "martyrs", Philoxinos said. The church has "a tough challenge ahead to make the people aware of the great sin they are committing."

The bishop also blamed government welfare programs that offer "incentives" for farmers to commit suicide. These stem from attempts by political parties to boost their voter base, by putting pressure on the government to write off the loans of debt-trapped farmers who commit suicide.

As a result, the dependant family of a farmers who commits suicide is eligible for government compensation ranging between 50,000 to 100,000 Indian rupees (US\$2270), the freezing of loan recoveries, and even writing off of entire loans.

"If people are committing suicide when they find the going tough, then faith becomes meaningless," asserted Philoxinos. "The challenge now is to take them back to the basics of our faith. Our people need to be told the story of Job who trusted God in good times and bad times."

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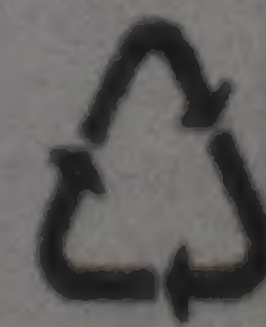
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Ideas

Affluenza: Afflicting the comfortable

I remember flying home from a college mission trip to Haiti many years ago and having a stop-over in Miami. Our host decided that a good way to spend the few hours was to visit one of Miami's giant malls. We were all immediately struck by the stark contrast with Haiti. We felt sick in the midst of the opulence.

It was a moment of clarity. We are sick. Sick, not from some sort of deprivation, but rather from an excess, an over-abundance. This is an illness of the wealthy, a luxury unavailable to the poor of the earth. I'm talking about consumerism.

My wife was at a medical conference where one of the experts declared that the children born in 2006 will be the first generation in recorded history to have a lower life expectancy than their parents. The cause: childhood obesity, and the diabetes and heart disease that result. The lecturer concluded his talk with a comparison between the opulence and decadence of the late Roman Empire and our society, suggesting we shall witness the waning of our own "empire."

"Over-eating," of course, is not the heart of the issue. John De Graaf et al. in their book *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (BK, 2005) diagnose the disease as "affluenza," which he defines as "a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more." The book is full of interesting anecdotes and trivia. For example, it's a fact that more people have declared bankruptcy every year since 1996 (in the USA) than graduate from college. This is not just an addiction, it's an illness.

"Consumption" is a double entendre: the word used to be synonymous with tuberculosis. When you have such consumption, it literally eats away at you. Not only do you become thin and waste away, but your lungs are literally eaten up. Couple that definition with our situation, and you could say that in our eating things up, we are being eaten up. We are eating not only ourselves up, but developing countries and the planet in our globalized frenzy of greed, debt and waste. We are being consumed by our consumption.

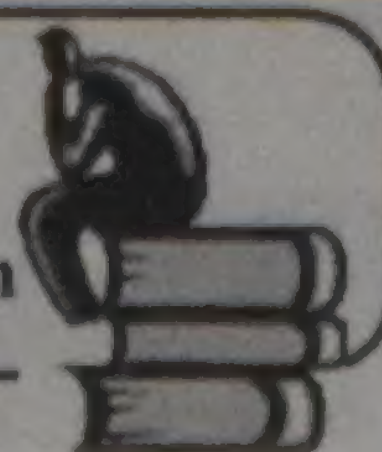
"Post-Material" world

Some groups who see that we are sick offer their remedies. Voluntary Simplicity, The Center for the New American Dream and what has been called "The New Monasticism" all have on-line sites with a host of creative, practical, and healthy alternatives. If one of these groups were meeting in my neighborhood, I would probably join up.

The irony of this "new Puritanism" as some have called it, is that much of it is not necessarily Christian (as the Puritans were). A further irony of the anti-consumerist movement is that it offers the world another thing to consume: a new lifestyle. You not only can buy the idea, but also the books, the conferences, and the magazines (for example, *Real Simple*, *Organic Style*, or *Frugal Living for Dummies*). Perhaps these function like a vaccine: a little bit of the disease heightens your immune system and thereby enables you to counteract the full effects of the epidemic. One writer called "an aesthetic for the counter-cultural privileged"—an aesthetic that may also produce self-satisfied

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman



feelings of moral superiority.

I do not want to be too cynical of these worthy attempts at transformation, but I am wary of some of the slogans these groups use. Mantras such as "because the best things in life are not things" and "we must not try to meet non-material needs materially" may have some good insights, but they come with two blind spots. The first is that it's easy to say that "the best things in life are not things" if all your stuff is in danger of busting through the roof tiles. But imagine you are living hand-to-mouth from day to day. Clean water, clothing, and shelter will seem pretty close to "best things."

Secondly, there is a dualism at work in those remarks. While I agree that having thousands of shoes will never fully satisfy the restlessness of our hearts, the assumption that material objects in and of themselves cannot possibly carry non-material goodness is mistaken. In a Christian worldview material things are not unspiritual. In fact, many are God-given gifts to cherish. For example, we know that a wedding gift can carry expressions of love and support, and crutches speak to us of hope and healing long after their use has expired. Things can incarnate significant "non-material" meanings. Things can help and heal.

Wanting to be deceived

Still, the simplicity movement has much to offer. If consumption is a disease, it is most certainly a contagious one. The virus is transmitted through 12,000 brand name ads per day, and church attendance does not make us immune. The promises of power, status, or happiness is an enormous lie that we all "buy into." The fact is we want to be deceived. Consumption has become our preferred way of life in North America.

The issue is ultimately one of idolatry, stewardship, and care for the poor. Do we live to consume, or consume in order to live? Do we possess what we own, or does what we own possess us? How can we live with a frugality and generosity that doesn't strip the plant bare? How can we make a difference?

Many students today have not resigned themselves to the *status quo*. Torontonians Craig Kielburger is a child advocate in both senses. At age 12 he decided he wanted to help the poor children of the world by raising awareness and funds for poor children worldwide. Now, at age 23, he runs an organization called "Free the Children" which provides health care, safe drinking water, and education for over one million children in over 40 countries.

He spoke to about 400 students at Guelph University recently and said, "We are global in every way, except our compassion." He explained how the \$18 billion we spend on make-up every year (or the \$17 billion we spend on pet food) would be enough to eliminate world hunger. It's a sobering thought. We are sick from too much, while so many are sick from too little. The comfortable are afflicted, while the afflicted go without comfort. You have to wonder how long this can go on.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.



Religion after Freud

Tony Campolo

Sigmund Freud was the apostle of disbelief. He was the one who made psychoanalysis a part of our culture, and in so doing he kicked out a flying buttress that had been essential for holding up our cathedral of faith. There is no doubt that religion had already waned under the onslaught of the Enlightenment, but it was Freud who provided the radically new understanding of human nature that made any religious explanation of the whats and whys of our personhood seem naïve.

Religion had established rules and regulations that governed our behavior. Our impulses and instincts

had been kept in check by those rules and regulations which religion had taught us had been established by God. We knew that keeping our intense sexual appetites under control and gratified only within the confines of marriage was crucial for establishing a stable society.

The reason we obeyed such rules, which were obviously a source of great frustration and, as Freud would say "discontent," was that we believed that they were handed down to us from Heaven. We did not yield to our impulses because we were convinced that God forbade such behavior and that deviation from his will would carry with it horrendous punishments.

Freud delivered us from all of that by telling us those rules were really created by the society into which we were socialized, and were drilled into our subconscious minds by the likes of our parents (in his day, primarily fathers). Freud taught us that it wasn't God that imposed judgment on us and made us feel guilty when we stepped out of line. Instead, it was the superego—that idealized concept of what a good person is supposed to be and do—given to us by our parents, that condemned us for what had been hitherto regarded as ungodly behavior. Instead of a transcendent God, it was this subconscious ideal self that had been created by those who reared us from infancy that said "no" to our natural impulses and desires.

Through psychoanalysis, Freud told us, we could come to understand those condemning inner feelings. He delivered us from that which would otherwise have kept us from the gratifications and self-fulfillment that could make us happy.

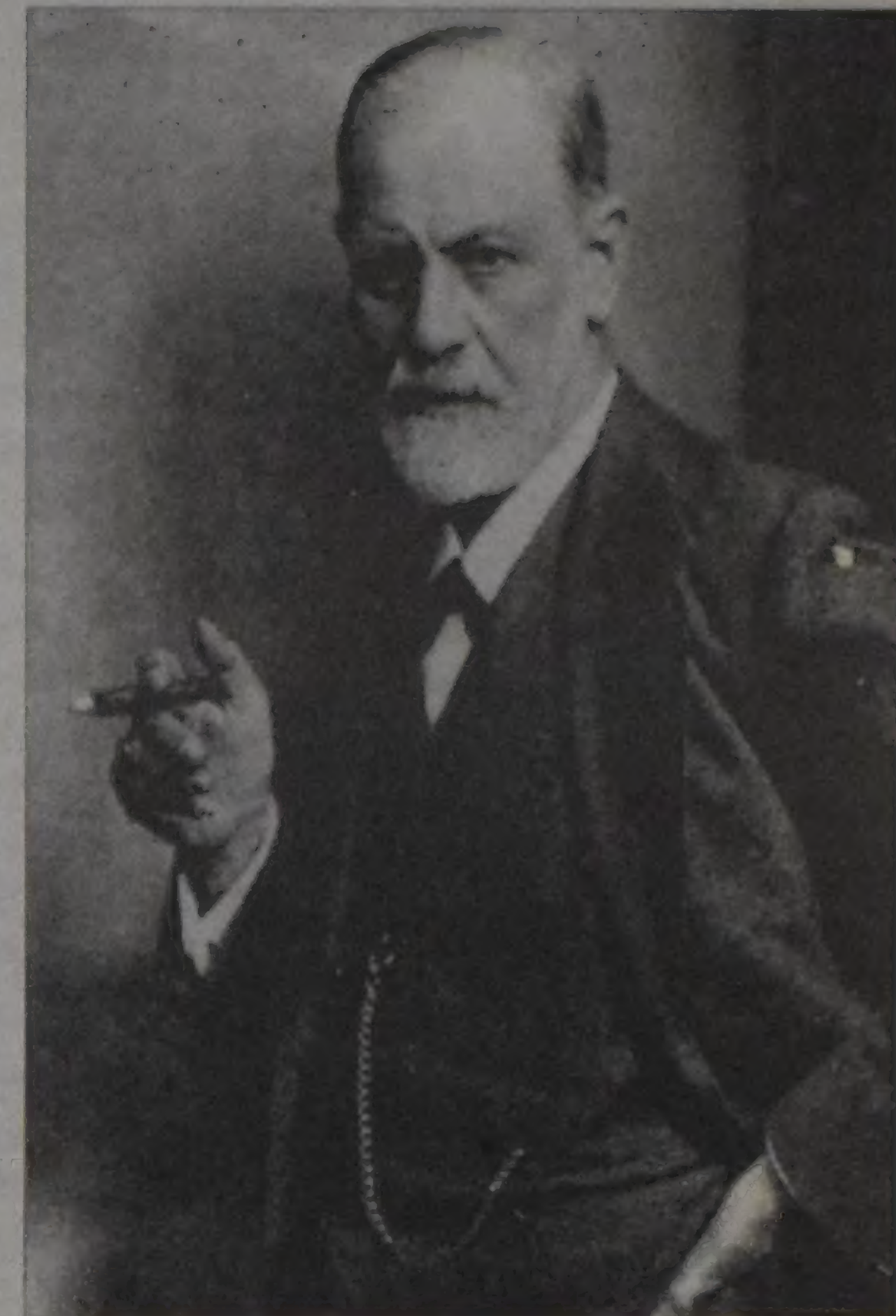
The frustrations that result from having to obey the socially created policeman in our subconscious, said Freud, are what make us neurotic. Furthermore, if we are to become the self-actualized, fulfilled human beings we long to be, we must realize what the superego does to us, and in this understanding be freed from its "harmful" effects.

In our post-Freudian world it is no longer a goal to become people of character who live out a God-ordained ideal of selfhood. Instead, in the triumph of Freudian-inspired hyper-individualism, each person is urged to live out his or her appetites for gratification. All of this was to the end that each of us would become satiated and satisfied with life. With Freud, God, and the need for God-dictated restraints, had been abolished.

If we stop to think about it, there is, to use Stephen Colbert's term, a certain, "truthiness" to Freud's theories. What he said has been asserted by great intellects, such as the recently deceased Philip Rieff, who claimed that Freud was scientific. However, it should be pointed out that there is nothing at all scientific about Freud's theories. Is there any empirical proof that fits within the canons of science and validates his claims?

Who's to say that there is any more support for Freud's psychoanalytic concept of the superego than there is for that old time religion that asserted that there is a God who ordains what is right and wrong, and that his

See Freud on page 7...



Stewardship

The materialistic generation?

New polls show that young people's obsession with material things is growing – and that being rich is more important to them than in the past.

A poll by the Pew Research Center reports that about 80 per cent of 18- to 25-year-olds set their life's goal as getting rich.

In UCLA's annual survey of college freshmen, nearly three-quarters of those surveyed in 2006 thought it was essential or very important to be "very well-off financially." That compares with 62.5 per cent who said the same in 1980 and 42 per cent in 1966, the first year the survey was done.

Psychologist Jean Twenge, author of *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before*, said, "There are a lot of young people hitting 25 who are making, say, \$35,000 a year, who expected they'd be millionaires or at least making six figures."

On the other hand, Twenge points out, many young people graduate from university burdened with debts of \$30,000 or more and have trouble making ends meet.

A number of psychologists have warned that parents have become averse to saying "No" to their children. They are spending five times as much on them as a generation earlier in an attempt to keep them happy. As a result, they caution, kids are going into life with unrealistic expectations and are incurring too much debt.

Freud . . . cont. from p. 6

righteousness endures for all generations?

If we are to be pragmatic and judge these two options by their results, there is little doubt that the God postulate comes out on top. In a world increasingly governed by the impulse release theories of Freud, marital infidelity has become commonplace, premarital sex with all of its destructive consequences has become prevalent, and society in general has lost, as the poet Yeats would say, "its center."

Instead of self-fulfilling and self-actualizing persons emerging out of the milieu created by the triumph of the psychoanalytical therapy created by Freud and his followers, we have instead the individuated selfish homo sapiens who seeks only the maximization of personal pleasure. And since wealthy, successful people

are the ones who are most likely to have the means to pursue those pleasures that offer the only meaning in this post-Freudian society, is it any wonder that we are raising up a generation of children whose aspirations in life are wholly materialistic?

If judged pragmatically, would you not have to conclude that psychoanalysis has not been the cure for society's illness but actually may be the cause of its sicknesses? Judged pragmatically, it is easy to conclude that believing in a God-ordained order of right and wrong offers the best hope for a humanity that does not go crazy with a pseudo-science that leaves us in a norm-less world in which each seeks the maximization of pleasure without regard to judgment.

RRSPs & RRIFs

It's that time of year again as advertisers remind us to put money into Registered Retirement Savings Plans (RRSPs) so that we can take advantage of a reduction in income tax. The deadline for investing in RRSPs that reduce 2006 Income Tax returns is midnight March 1.

The pundits and so many so-called experts in advertising will make a strong case to sock away some money into your RRSP. For the most part, they are right. Putting money into an RRSP is very attractive if you are filing an income tax return and know that you will be paying income tax. But there are number of things to consider if you have some 'extra' money that you are considering putting into an RRSP.

If you are considering borrowing to invest funds into an RRSP be sure you consider all the costs and the benefits. The best advice I can give you is to speak with a financial advisor – I am not one, so I hope that this article will encourage you and help you decide to make an appointment to get more information and advice.

For those who are unfamiliar with RRSPs, a RRSP is, in simple terms, a place where you can put money or other investments in a registered account that allows assets to grow without income taxation. These assets can grow by interest earned, dividends, or by capital gains (increase in value). The income taxation becomes a factor only when you are ready to withdraw it. Normally this would be at retirement; however, there may also be other possibilities (depending on your plan), such as withdrawals for a Home Buyers Plan or a Lifelong Learning Plan. But they have additional restrictions and a repayment obligation.

One of the arguments that the pundits use to persuade us (and especially newly employed young adults) to invest in an RRSP is the 'wonder of compounding'. Consider how a sum of money, say \$1000, invested now and growing at an average of 6 per cent a year will double in 12 years (rule of 72: $72/6=12$). Therefore, a 25-year-old putting away \$1000 into an RRSP now, without any further additions and earning an average of 6 per cent a year, can expect that investment to grow 8 times to \$8,000 by age 61!

But deciding to invest in a RRSP might not be your first priority. You have to make choices for immediate and short-term needs as well as any considerations for your retirement, which if you're young seems so far off. You may have greater priority somewhere else for your money than to be socking it away for retirement, even if the numbers indicate a good reason for you to invest in an RRSP. Your family's needs come first.

It is a God given calling to be a parent and a God given privilege to raise children in a Christian home and to participate in the work of the church in so many different ways. It demands of us: good stewardship.

So what do you do to balance your choices? Here are a few thoughts to keep in mind, when considering whether to put money into a RRSP (and remember my earlier advisory to consult a suitable financial advisor).

- If you have no tax payable on your income in a given year do not contribute to an RRSP.
- Do not contribute to an RRSP if you have credit card balances outstanding and no reserve fund of about 3 months net pay.
- Since contributions to an RRSP are tax deductible, they'll be more

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

valuable to those with higher incomes. Using a web-based RRSP calculator* for differing levels of taxable income (the number on which federal and provincial income tax is calculated – line 150) consider the net cost of a \$1000 investment into an RRSP in Ontario:

Taxable Income	Savings in Income Tax	Net Cost of \$1000 Investment	Immediate return on Investment
\$20,000	\$212	\$788	21%
\$35,000	\$221	\$779	22%
\$40,000	\$312	\$688	31%

*www.morningstar.ca/globalhome/rrspcalculator/index.asp

- If you have a mortgage on a longer than 15 year term, you may be better off to use the extra money to pay down your mortgage.
- For young families with children, an investment in a RESP may be a better and strategic use of money. The children's need for College/University education will most likely occur before their parents retire.
- Income level now and at retirement: If your income level is low now, you could be paying less income tax now than if you would invest it in an RRSP and withdraw it when you retire. In such cases you may be better off investing and growing it without the RRSP advantage in Dividend generating funds. Experts tell me that dividend income is efficient from a tax point of view.

RRIF

In the year that you turn 69, you must convert your RRSP into a Registered Retirement Income Fund, or buy an annuity, or withdraw it in cash (income tax will be sure to take a chunk of it). Any withdrawals from a RRIF are fully taxable. If you are on a low income prior to this, the withdrawal to supplement your income may result in a cancellation of the Guaranteed Income Supplement that is given to low-income seniors. Those with annual retirement incomes above \$60,000 should also be aware Old Age Security benefits also begin to be "clawed back" at that level.

Stewardly Tip: It is prudent to set up at least one RRSP for yourself and one for your spouse – especially if you are in a higher tax bracket and even if you only have one income. You can use Spousal RRSPs to direct funds into your spouse's RRSP and use it to maximize income tax reduction for the higher taxable income-earning spouse. Multiple RRSPs are possible but fewer is better to ease your management and to minimize fees. Consider investing in a Christian cause that offers RRSPs. Contact CSS to find out which of our partners offer RRSPs.

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly Tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Fundraising 1 – Moses

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario Rick's email: rickd@cssservices.ca



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Church

German Protestants look to Luther to inspire 21st-century church

Frauke Brauns

Wittenberg, Germany (ENI) – German Protestants gathered here, the town where Martin Luther launched the Reformation five centuries ago, to consider how to strengthen the profile of Protestantism in Germany.

“We are at a point of no return,” said Bishop Wolfgang Huber, who heads the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), the country’s main Protestant grouping, speaking at the end of a January 25-27 congress that assembled more than 300 delegates from throughout Germany.

The EKD has said that if it does not act now, then by 2030 it will have lost a third of its members and 50 percent of its income. Currently there are about 25 million Protestants, or less than a third of Germany’s 82 million people, within the EKD.

“At the centre of all Reformation has to be the Sunday service,” Huber stated in a speech opening the congress at the Wittenberg church where Luther in 1517 is said to have posted the 95 theses that led to the Reformation. “We have to concentrate on our spiritual capacity and our Christian mission,” he said, noting that preaching was at the centre of Luther’s message.

Tower of Wittenberg church



Huber’s remarks were echoed by Bishop Margot Kaessmann of Hanover. “We need to increase the quality of our worship and activities,” she said. “The church is willing to grow.”

The Wittenberg meeting followed the publication of a 110-page document in July 2006 outlining reform proposals. These included reducing the total number of Protestant pastors from the current 22,000 to 16,500 by 2030. It also suggested cutting the number of regional churches grouped under the EKD umbrella from the current 23 to a maximum of 12, something that generated criticism. However, in comments in his closing speech seen as responding to this criticism, Huber said the EKD had no “master plan about the number or structure of the regional churches”.

He told journalists he hoped regional churches would discuss ways of merging or strengthening cooperation. But, he added, “This is their responsibility, not that of the EKD.”

Survey finds 300m China believers

Dan Wooding Founder of ASSIST Ministries

SHANGHAI, CHINA (ANS) – The number of religious believers in China could be three times higher than official estimates, according to a survey reported by state media.

A story from the BBC says that a poll of 4,500 people by Shanghai university professors found 31.4 per cent of people above the age of 16 considered themselves as religious.

“This suggests 300 million people nationwide could be religious, compared to the official figure of 100 million,” said the BBC story.

“China is regularly criticized for cracking down on unauthorized worship. Believers are only allowed to attend government-approved churches, mosques and temples.

“Correspondents say the poll’s findings back up suspicions that religion has been enjoying a resurgence in China over the past 20 years, as Communist Party disapproval has eased.

“But the party is still ready to deal harshly with any religious group it perceives to be a challenge to its authority....”

Rapid change

The BBC said that the poll was carried out by professors at the East China Normal University in Shanghai.

“Their methodology was not made clear in the state media reports, neither was it clear whether people are becoming religious, or becoming more prepared to say so,” the BBC story continued.

But the official China Daily called their work the “country’s first major survey on religious beliefs”.

The survey found that Buddhism, Taoism, Catholicism, Christianity and Islam are the country’s five major religions. China considers Catholicism as separate to Christianity, which covers Protestantism. About 200 million believers “are Buddhists, Taoists or worshipers of legendary figures such as the Dragon King and God of Fortune,” the China Daily reported. The survey also found a significant rise in Christianity – accounting for 12 per cent of all believers, or 40 million, compared with the official figure of 16 million in 2005.

The story said that Professor Liu Zhongyu, who helped carry out the survey, attributed the rise in religious belief to growing freedoms in the country as well as the upheaval of rapid social and economic change. He said the average age of religious believers had fallen, with two-thirds of those in the poll who considered themselves religious aged between 16 and 39.

“This is markedly different from the previous decade, when most religious believers were in their 40s or older,” he said in the Chinese-language *Oriental Outlook* magazine, which published the survey.

Dan Wooding is an award winning British journalist now living in Southern California with his wife Norma. He is the founder and international director of ASSIST (Aid to Special Saints in Strategic Times) and the ASSIST News Service (ANS).

Muslim groups in Germany cancel meeting with Protestants

Hanover, Germany (ENI) – Four Muslim organizations in Germany have called off a meeting with Protestant leaders planned for February, saying there is a need for “considerable explanation” about recently-published church guidelines urging greater clarity in Christian-Muslim relations.

Germany’s top Protestant bishop, Wolfgang Huber, said in comments to leaders of the four Muslim organizations made available on January 31: “I was particularly surprised that your justification for cancelling the meeting was the need for further discussion.”

The meeting between the Muslim groups and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), the country’s main Protestant grouping, had been scheduled for February 6 in Berlin.

The EKD published the guidelines in November in a document entitled, “Clarity and being good neighbors.” It said “mistakes and conflicts” relating to the integration

of Muslims in Germany needed to be addressed by the followers of the two faiths, the German Protestant news agency epd reported.

The document highlighted the issues of religious conversion, the role of women and religiously-motivated violence. It stated that cultural identity could not take priority over human rights, and that the systematic unequal treatment of men and women, so-called “honor killings”, female circumcision, and forced marriages could not be tolerated in a democracy.

Muslims account for about 3.4 percent of Germany’s 82.4 million people. Protestants and Roman Catholics account for about a third each.

The EKD document said the wearing of Muslim headscarves by women teachers raised doubts about their suitability to teach at state schools, something that raised

Dutch churches generate more income with fewer members

Andreas Havinga

Utrecht, Netherlands (ENI) – Despite declining membership, five Dutch denominations have generated their best-ever result in their annual fundraising drive, which organisers say generates more money than any other campaign in the Netherlands. “Fewer members, yet more income,” was one headline after the publication in mid-January of the results for 2005 of the fundraising effort, dubbed “Kerkebalans” (or the “church’s bottom line”), to raise money for costs such as salaries and the maintenance of buildings.

Figures published earlier in mid-January showed that the country’s two largest denominations – the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands – and three smaller churches jointly raised 384.5 million euros (US\$500 million) in 2005, an increase of 1.1 percent compared to 2004.

The 2 million-member Protestant Church raised 271 million euros from Kerkebalans, offerings and other fund-raising efforts, an increase of 1.87 percent compared to the previous year. The 4.4 million-member Roman Catholic Church raised more than 59 million euros from “Kerkebalans”, a decrease of about 200 000 euros compared to 2004.

The 2005 campaign coincided with fundraising for the victims of the Asian tsunami but concern that the results would show the first decrease in income since the campaign began more than 30 years ago, proved unfounded.

Still, income reported for both the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches fell short of covering their total expenses.

The Protestant church is due to close its nine regional centres at the end of 2007 and aims to cut 40 percent of its 410 staff positions by 2015. The funds raised by the Roman Catholic Church through “Kerkebalans” were not enough in themselves to cover the costs of maintaining its church buildings, which in 2005 cost 69.9 million euros, or 40 percent of all expenses.

The Protestant church noted in its contribution to the “Kerkebalans” report that smaller congregations often raise more income per member than larger congregations. “The involvement [of church members] often decreases the larger the congregation is. The consequences of this are also visible in the financial developments of the congregations,” the denomination’s Council for Local Fundraising stated.

Jan-Gerd Heetderks, moderator of the Protestant church’s general synod, acknowledged at the presentation of the “Kerkebalans” report on January 11 that making bigger congregations through merging several churches often results in members becoming less involved. “But, on the other hand, he said enlargement offers a small church other benefits.

The smaller denominations participating in “Kerkebalans” are the Mennonite Church, the Remonstrant Brotherhood and the Old Catholic Church.

the ire of Germany’s Islam Council.

The council’s chairperson, Ali Kizilkaya, said the EKD document raised the question as to whether the issue was about proselytising Muslims or understanding Islam.

In his comments to the Muslim groups, Bishop Huber said he regretted there would now be no opportunity to discuss what had been intended by the EKD document or the reaction of Muslim leaders to the guidelines. He said it would be up to the Muslim groups to propose a date for a new meeting.

A first top-level meeting between the EKD and the four Muslim groups – the central Turkish-Islamic Union of the Institute for Religion, the Islam Council, the Association of Islamic Cultural Centres and the Central Council of Muslims – took place in January 2005. A second meeting followed in March 2006.

Church

Persecution growing fastest in Islamic world

Jeremy Reynolds

WEST SUSSEX UK (ANS) — As many as 250 million Christians worldwide will face persecution and repression in 2007, just for following Jesus Christ, according to the latest roundup of the world's persecution hot spots by Release International.

U.K.-based *Inspire Magazine* reported that Release, a voice for the persecuted church, has found that most persecution takes place in four distinct "zones," those of Islam, Communism, Hinduism and Buddhism. But persecution is growing fastest of all in the Islamic world.

Governments in even moderate Muslim countries often fail to safeguard the rights of their Christian minorities. According to Release, abuses suffered by Christians include kidnapping, forced conversion, imprisonment, church destruction, torture, rape and execution.

One of the world's worst abusers of religious freedom is Saudi Arabia, guardian of Islam's holiest sites Mecca and Medina. A Muslim found "guilty" of converting to Christianity could face the death sentence for apostasy. And anyone who leads a Muslim to Christ faces jail, expulsion or execution.

"There's a conspiracy of silence around Saudi," said Release International's CEO Andy Dipper, "probably because the West wants their oil and their money. But this is a government that hands out the death sentence for its own citizens who want nothing more than the freedom to choose their own faith. And while Saudi bans all Christian literature, it spends billions of dollars each year propagating Islam around the world."

But some of the most violent persecution in the Islamic world is beyond government control, *Inspire* reported. Since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 2001, the world has been made dramatically aware of Islamist global networks. Although the best known is Al Qaeda, there are others who exploit religious tensions for their own political ends.

A rising number of extremists interpret the call to jihad as a call to violence, commented Release. The organization added that extremists apparently regard it as their religious duty to force Christians and non-Muslims to convert to Islam. Those who refuse must be driven out or killed.

There is a growing movement to impose Islamic (Sharia) law, according to Release,

which results in increased pressure on Christians. In Nigeria, militants have driven Christians from their homes to remove political opposition and pave the way for Sharia law.

Despite the collapse of Communism in Europe, persecution of Christians continues in China, Cuba, Laos, Vietnam and North Korea.

Communist governments remain ideologically opposed to Christianity and have pursued systematic programs to weaken and destroy the Church. Some persecution also continues under the "old guard" in the former Soviet Union, and China, which for all its economic openness continues to drive Christians underground.

"As China prepares for the Olympic Games western governments would do well to remember that China detains more Christians than any other country," Dipper commented. "Believers and leaders who want nothing more than to worship freely face imprisonment, torture and even death."

In the Hindu world Christians face persecution in India and Nepal. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), one of India's largest political parties, is associated with militant Hindu nationalist groups. Extremists have

been involved in a growing number of attacks against both Christians and Muslims.

Several Indian states have introduced laws against forced conversion, but these are wide open to abuse, *Inspire* reported Release commented. Christians face most pressure in rural areas, where militants have destroyed churches and threatened, attacked and killed church leaders.

In the Buddhist world, Christians face persecution in Bhutan, Burma and Sri Lanka. Buddhist militants regard Christianity as a threat to their national identity and unity. They have stirred up harassment and violence against Christians in Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

Back in 1966 Burma expelled most of its Christian missions. Today the repressive military regime still maintains controls over religious activity. There have been many cases of forced conversion to Buddhism as well as violence against Christians, stated Release.

For more information about release go to www.releaseinternational.org/pages/what-we-do.php *Inspire* is a British-based monthly magazine distributed free to churches, with a circulation of 65,000. To learn more go to www.inspiremagazine.org.uk

Nigeria: State's policies said to strangle Christianity

Rev. Jerry Modibo

LAFIA, Nigeria (Compass Direct News) — As soon as Christians in this capital city of Nasarawa state tried to rebuild a Reformed Church building that Muslims burned down two years ago, more than 200 Islamists attacked the workers.

The rebuilding came to a halt, and the Nasarawa state government subsequently banned reconstruction of the facility. The church had been planted more than a century ago by missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa under the auspices of the then Sudan United Mission, headed by German missionary Dr. Karl Kunn.

"I personally witnessed the attack on the workers at the reconstruction site of the church," said the Rev. Jerry Modibo, chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Nasarawa state chapter. "The Muslims were chanting, 'Death to Christians, death to infidels. This town is for Muslims, we don't want Christians here.'"

The church was known as NKST, or Nongo u Kristu u ken Sudan hen Tiv, Church of Christ in the Sudan Among the Tiv [a member of the Reformed Ecumenical Council]. The Tiv are an ethnic group of central Nigeria. The congregation in the Angwan Tiv area of Lafia had lost their church building in religious rioting.

Angwan Tiv is just one of many areas of Lafia town where the government now forbids building churches, Modibo said. At the same time, he said, the Nasarawa administration has financed the building of mosques across the state with public funds. Some of these mosques have been built on the premises of various government ministries and agencies.

The church leader said Nasarawa state has also built mosques in the Governor's House and in the state House of Assembly, or parliament.

"If you are traveling from Lafia to Akwanga through Keffi to Abuja, you will see mosques being built along the road," Modibo said. "These mosques are being built by the state government in towns and villages like Shabu, Nasarawa Eggon, Akwanga, Sabon Gida, Keffi, and Gora. Yet no single church or chapel has been built for Christians in this state."

Christian public servants recently raised funds to build a chapel within the confines of the office of the deputy governor, who happens to be a Christian, Modibo said.

"They were ordered by the governor to stop the building of the chapel," he said. "But there are two mosques built by the government in the same premises. That is the kind of injustice confronting us in this state."

Gov. Abdullahi Adamu was not available for comment, and his commissioner for information and internal affairs, Suleiman Adokwe, declined to speak on these and other issues to Compass. "Religious issues are sensitive, and I cannot therefore speak on them," Adokwe said.

Muslim Chieftdoms

Nasarawa state policies are strangling Christian presence in the central Nigerian state, Modibo said. Officials deny Christians appointments to government institutions; at the same time, they promote junior-ranking Muslims above Christians in public service positions.

Nasarawa state has 51 "traditional rulers," or community leaders recognized by the govern-

ment. Modibo said that of this number, only 10 are Christians — the other 41 are Muslims.

"Abdullahi Adamu, the governor, did this by creating more chieftdoms to favor Muslims, and meanwhile he was stifling Christian community leaders by making them second fiddle in the scheme of things in this state," Modibo said.

Discrimination in public service, the Christian leader said, has become a lifestyle for Christian public servants in the state. Of the 18 commissioners in government service, he said, only six are Christians.

"Last year Gov. Adamu appointed 18 commissioners, and 12 are Muslims," he said. "Yet Christians constitute the largest population of the state — if you visit all 29 local government areas of this state and take statistics of all the people of these areas, you will discover that Christians constitute well over two-thirds of the state's 1.2 million population."

In addition, Modibo said, in the past 10 years appointments of federal ministers and ambassadors — based on recommendations from the state governor — have favored Muslims.

"Only one Christian in the past 10 years has ever been appointed a minister, and even then he was not allowed to complete his term of office," Modibo said. "The same scenario played out in ambassadorial appointments — only one Christian has been appointed an ambassador in the past 10 years from this state."

In the Christian-majority state, elections have been manipulated to perpetuate Muslim political leadership, he added.

Modibo, also a pastor with the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ said Christians have made concerted efforts to dialogue with Gov. Abdullahi Adamu on these issues without success.

"Several attempts have been made by us to sit with the governor on a round table to discuss and find solutions to these issues, but our efforts yielded no results," Modibo said. "In addition to personal contacts with officers of the protocol department, we have written thrice seeking to have an audience with the governor but have waited almost eternally."

Pilgrimage to Justice

Nigerian state governments have assumed responsibility for helping to finance pilgrimages for Muslims to Mecca and for Christians to Jerusalem. Christians in Nasarawa believe the state has discriminated against them in this area as well.

In 2005, Nasarawa state budgeted and distributed 200 million naira (US\$1.6 million) for Muslim pilgrims. The state budgeted 15 million naira (US\$121,832) for Christians.

"Even this amount was not released for the sponsorship of Christian pilgrims after its approval," Modibo said. From 2000 to 2005, Muslim pilgrims to Mecca sponsored by the state totaled 6,220, while the state supported only 355 Christians — and many of those encountered difficulties in obtaining the assistance, Modibo said.

"We have been facing a lot of tribulations, trials, and frustrations here in Nasarawa state," he said. "The church here is facing the most difficult period of her life."

Modibo noted that Proverbs 31:8-9 advocates speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves, defending the rights of the destitute, and letting justice flow.

"So, we are demanding that there be justice and fairness to all," he said. "All religions in this state should be treated fairly."

God's creation

The grader sent from heaven

Paul DeVries

"Fellows, these are your assignments for tomorrow."

The dispatcher handed the papers to Dan, the operator. We, Dan and I, work for an oil- and gas- well servicing company. We provide oil and gas companies with critical information from inside the well through the use of recorders, or perform cleaning- and other services necessary to ensure the wells best performance.

We travel with two trucks. Dan drives the heavier truck with all the tools and specialty equipment on it; I follow with the "picker-truck", a flatbed that has a crane as its main equipment, much lighter than Dan's truck. We often work in an area of Alberta called the "Chinchauga hills". A long trail runs through this area, the "Chinchauga trail", fondly referred to as "The Chin". It is the main access road to the many other service roads that branch from it into the bush.

Our first assignment that day was about 60 kilometers up the Chin where we turned on a service road going south. These service roads are only single lane but wide enough to accommodate a large truck. To drive on those roads they ought to be frozen hard enough, as they were now, to accommodate the weight of the trucks. It is not for nothing, however, that the area is called "hills" because there are many of them, interspersed by numerous creeks, solidly frozen also.

It had snowed heavily the night before we arrived. Graders keep the main road (The Chin) quite clean and any service roads they expect will have traffic. Perhaps the oil company had not informed the graders or they were unable to get to the road in time, but the road was covered with about fifty centimeters of snow with a layer of ice under it.

We negotiated this snow covered, hilly and winding road hoping to make it to the location. On top of one of the hills, we stopped to survey the situation before proceeding. The way down was a steep, long and winding hill. At the bottom of the hill was a ninety-degree left turn that immediately led onto a single lane wooden bridge crossing a large creek.



We noted that just where the left turn started there seemed to be an abandoned service road going somewhat to the right that could be utilized as an emergency route, should need be. Dan's truck, being much heavier and better equipped than mine, would have little difficulty to negotiate this slope.

I watched Dan going down and across the bridge without any real difficulty. Cautiously I began the decline too, keeping the truck at as slow a speed as possible. The difficulty was that in too low a gear the rear wheels would lock on the ice and the back of the truck would start sliding sideways. Too much speed and I would not be able to navigate the bends in the road. Once committed to go, there was no stopping or backing up.

Several times the back of the truck began to slide away, but through use of the clutch and selecting the "correct" gear, I kept the vehicle controlled. After, what seemed an eternity; I crossed the bridge, stopped behind Dan and took a deep breath.

We then looked at the hill from the bottom up and concluded that the return trip would be quite a challenge. Another four kilometers and we were at the well site.

After several hours we had completed our first assignment, it took us longer than we anticipated due to working in the deep snow. With all the equipment put away again, or "rigged out", it was time to go to the second job.

Now we had to return to the top of the hill. Foremost in my mind was how am I ever going to climb that hill. I would have to keep my speed up in the deep snow, get over the bridge and then turn hard right on that icy ninety-degree turn with enough speed to have momentum to get up that hill.

If I didn't have enough speed on the hill the truck would begin

slipping and there would be no way of securing it. It would begin sliding back to the bottom. To guide the truck backwards into the abandoned service road would take a great deal of skill – and even more to keep it from rolling over completely.

I sat in my truck, the engine idling,

waiting for Dan to lead the way. I did what I regularly do before driving, I prayed asking for guidance and safety as we negotiate the road. I also asked for surefootedness of the truck and the ability to make wise choices in driving to ensure a safe trip not only for myself but for others as well.

Looking up after my prayer, I saw Dan leaving, and I was on my way also, following in his tracks. All the while my mind was consumed by how to approach that ninety-degree corner and the hill.

Then, to my amazement, I saw that a large section of the road leading up to the bridge and around the corner had been ploughed nice and clean. The challenge of making the perfect approach was now eliminated. I drove over the bridge and around the corner with ease, hoping to maintain enough speed to climb the hill.

The hill too had been graded, and although it remained an icy surface, the speed of the truck made it possible to climb. Two-thirds of the way up the hill the truck started to lose some speed because of the steepness of the grade, but it never slipped.

Dan was waiting for me just past the crest of the hill, where he could observe my progress, but he had parked directly in my path. When he saw the speed I had and the short distance I had to go yet, he realized I needed to stop precisely where he was parked. Quickly he pulled forward and I stopped right at the spot where he had been.

Getting out of our trucks, we looked down the hill we had just climbed on sheer ice and then looked ahead down the path still to be driven.

"I didn't think you would make it up the hill," said Dan, "let alone come over the top that fast. That's why I stopped short."

A little later, he added, "Funny

Global warming report: a call for all to care for God's creation

Faith and science can compliment each other to accomplish a common cause.

Joel C. Hunter

The earth is not heating up nearly as fast as the debate about its climate. We can blow up so irresponsibly that we lose the steam we need to act constructively. Or we can respond to this environmental challenge in a way that increases respect and effectiveness, while decreasing the hot error.

Every major religion has a moral mandate to take care of the Earth. For those who look to the Bible for instruction, it is the first responsibility given to man: "The Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep [protect] it" (Gen: 2:15, NASB). Our moral obligation, then, does not depend on the rate our planet is warming, or even whether the main cause is human activity. We are to refrain from harming God's creation – period. Few Christians or persons of other faiths (or no faith) would disagree with that statement.

But the latest reports indicate the need to move the care of creation up the priority scale. The great news is that individually we can help as much as we have harmed the physical environment, but we must watch out that we don't poison the environment of relationships in the process.

Defuse rather than accuse

We need the skeptics; they are a valuable part of the conversation. Skeptics see a speck of truth we need to consider. I have found that if I ignore them, all those specks can accumulate into a log in my own eye. Skeptics can keep us honest and steer our remedies away from some negative consequences with their warnings: "You're going to destroy the economy!" "You are trying to create a panic!" "This is more politics than science!" Truthfully, we do need to calmly and reasonably create market-based solutions that don't depend more on government policy than on grass-roots participation. What we don't need to do is yell back.

Jesus was really great at not being preoccupied with retaliation. Even when the attack was personally hurtful, his response was, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." Some think global warming is a hoax. But if we reduce pollution in a way that won't cause more harm than good, what's the problem? On the wild chance that the growing evidence has been misread, we still end up with a better world. On the other hand, some of us think that the climate change skeptics are missing the overwhelming evidence and that their disbelief may delay much-needed reform. Forgiving those not ready to act while equipping those who are ready to act improves both the spiritual and physical environment.

Defer to credible authority

We don't need to try to personally argue people to our side. Few of us are scientists. Fewer of us are world-class climatologists whose research must be reviewed by peers hundreds of times over. Even fewer of us realize how quickly the tools for measuring climate change and atmospheric conditions have advanced in the past few years. Indeed, the earlier reports have passed their expiration date.

The most credible authority on climate change is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a panel of hundreds of the world's best scientists, evaluated by hundreds of other scientists, further evaluated by government officials of 154 countries and the major national academies of science around the world. Scientists, like cats, are difficult to coordinate. Therefore, this continually updated consensus report is a very conservative document. This year's report, released last Friday, says that there is more than a 90 per cent likelihood that human activity is a significant contributor to climate change. I believe it because they are the experts (not politicians or some retired engineer who has "done his own research"). All the disagreements I have read have either been founded on old information or have very limited perspectives.

See Global warming report on page 15

that nothing else was graded – just that one spot leading to the hill and the hill itself."

Prayers are answered, I told Dan – sometimes yes, sometimes no. But this time it was definitely yes.

The rest of the day was just an-

other day, servicing wells deep in the bush. But all through the day I continued to think how great it was for God to be there, in the middle of nowhere, and send a grader to clean up just what we needed to get back out safely.

Life challenges

Setting up chairs for my sister

Rod Hugen

My sister has cerebral palsy. She wakes up most mornings in severe jolting pain. Her muscles spasm and jerk and there is no way to anticipate or prepare for the pain. She has had numerous surgeries to clip muscles and attempt to ease the suffering. She lives on large doses of muscle relaxants and pain pills which contribute their own awful side effects. Walking is almost impossible without assistance from her help dog, Ross, a big, tall standard poodle. As she ages the pain becomes greater and the 'what we can do' becomes less.

She wants to be healed. She wants to dance and run and go for long walks in the rain. She wants to jump rope and ride a bike and park in regular parking spaces. She wants it so bad she can taste it.

She asked me to pray that she would be healed and to ask others to pray. She has heard every reason why it won't happen. From her lack of faith to the fact that she hasn't asked correctly. She has been told that God doesn't do miracles and that she is selfish. She has been told that she is serving as an example to others and that 'it could be worse'. She has been told to just grin and bear it and to stop complaining.

She admits that it all may be true, but she still wants to be healed and wants me to pray for her to be healed every day.

When I was a teenager I spent summers working on my uncles' farms in Iowa. Toward the end of one of those summers, I came home to Phoenix and found that Ruth had just had her casts removed. Casts that went from foot to hip. Casts that had immobilized her for months after another painful surgery to clip muscles. She needed to learn to walk again and she was terrified and in horrific pain.

On Sunday nights I would stay home from church to take care of her. She was maybe five at the time. I read stories to her and then I set up two kitchen chairs back to back so she could pull herself up between them and take those first painful, shaky steps. Before the family returned from church, we would quickly put the chairs away and pretend that nothing had happened.

The next week we set up more chairs and she kept making progress. It was our secret. Eventually



A young girl with cerebral palsy

she could cover some distance without the benefit of the chairs. I would clap and cheer and she would try harder.

Finally the night came when we showed Mom and the others what she could do. She walked all the way across the room without chairs. We clapped and cheered.

She is my hero. I love her. I want her to be healed.

I know that ultimately when we ask for healing we are asking to be present with God. And to be present with God is truly to be healed. I know that as well as I know anything.

But, I hate that she suffers so much in this world. I have had it out with God about these untraceable sins. She was born with CP because at some crucial time her brain was oxygen starved. She was a premature baby. She didn't do anything that was traceable to a particular bad decision on her part that makes her bear the brunt of this evil.

Like most, I want to know why. God is silent to me about that. I've learned to grudgingly acknowledge his sovereignty. Traceable sins are so much easier to deal with for me. Cause and effect. I choose to take the money out of the register, the cops arrest me, I suffer. It is so much nicer that way. So much more 'just' according to my warped sense of justice.

When Ruth asks me why, I can only shrug my shoulders and weep and point to the Ultimate Sufferer.

And truth be told, the guy who dips his hand in the till has plenty of untraceable sin that led him to that spot also.

And we are all born in sin. I understand that without truly getting

THE BIG PICTURE

I have a love/hate relationship with technology. While I'm fascinated with what modern electronic devices can do, I am equally frustrated with my own limitations in using them. So when I bought a digital camera a couple of months ago, I decided to take a course to learn how to use it. It's been an eye-opener.

I was intimidated less than ten minutes into the first class. All the other "kids" seemed to have far more sophisticated equipment than mine. Our instructor's name is Howard, a professional photographer with a passion for his work, judging by the pictures on the walls of his studio. That first night he had us thumbing furiously through our manuals, prompting us to poke buttons and turn dials I didn't even know existed. He rattled on about aperture, shutter speed, white balance and exposure value at a breakneck pace. Then, as if reading my thoughts (or maybe it was the deer-caught-in-the-headlights look in my eyes) he said, "Don't worry if none of this makes sense to you. It will in a couple of weeks."

For homework we were told to re-read our manuals and try to understand them, and photograph an object using various settings so that we could begin to see the effects of manual controls. And we were to return the following week with a set of 4x6 prints of "a line, a spot and a circle."

I fell asleep quickly that night. Learning always tucks me out. I dreamed of all the gorgeous pictures I would take. But I woke abruptly at midnight. What did he mean by a "spot?" I understood about leading lines and could easily imagine all kinds of circular subjects, but a spot? When questioned about that, Howard had smirked a little and replied, "That's for you to figure out."

I tossed and turned. Maybe I'd make a grilled cheese sandwich and put a spot of ketchup beside it. Or maybe I'd spill a spot of milk on the table. I could photograph my favorite spot down by the creek. I seriously considered changing our cat's name from Spike to Spot. I finally went back to sleep – you guessed it – seeing spots.

On the way home from the accountant's office the next day I began my homework, stopping a dozen times to take pictures. After shooting at least thirty frames (wonderful invention – digital memory), I had a selection of leading lines and circles. But still no spot.

Late Saturday afternoon I took my camera along when I walked Rocky. We got back just as the sun was setting. I turned and aimed at the golden ball caught in the bare maple branches. The pink/orange sky reflected off the snow, tingeing it with lavender. And I knew I had found my spot.

As I flipped through the prints deciding which ones to take to class, I realized what an unexpected blessing this exercise had been. How many times had I driven right past these scenes and not given them a second glance? The photos were all so familiar to me, and yet in a way, new and exciting. There's a strange satisfaction in having permission to slow down and appreciate the humble dignity of a country church

or the stark glory of a winter landscape.

Photography, like writing, gives me licence to seek treasures hidden in plain view amidst the ordinary – to ponder the details of everyday life, express them in my own words (or mega pixels), and celebrate them with anyone willing to share them with me. I imagine it's the same feeling a poet, painter or musician has for her work. It's part of being made in God's image – to have that innate desire to create.

Howard was pleased with the variety of "spot" photos his students brought in. They were as unique and creative as the people who took them. Turned out that all he really wanted us to do was to use our imaginations and open our eyes to the possibilities around us. Mission accomplished.

Later that evening I thought about something he had said: "Some people have a gift for photography. That's something you can't learn. You either have it, or you don't." Agreed. But I would add that the smallest gift, when eagerly cultivated, can yield enormous rewards; while the greatest gift, left unused, benefits no one.

One afternoon as I drove to visit our daughters, Jack snoozed in the passenger's seat. At least, I thought he was asleep. I subtly scoped out the countryside, looking for potential photo opps. His voice broke the silence. "You know, you remind me of a farmer in the spring – craning your neck from one field to another like your head might just come off."

"Oh relax," I said. "I'm driving carefully... multitasking. No worries." But in my heart I knew the truth – Howard had created a monster. I couldn't help but scour the passing scenery for one more potential picture.

Last night we talked about wide-angle lenses. It's amazing how much information one of those babies can compress into a single photograph. It made me think of how God sees reality, compared to us. What appears to us as ancient history is never far removed from him. He sees time and eternity all in one sweeping panorama. We're the ones with the limited (and often distorted) perspective. It takes a lens of faith to see the big picture.

This week we're working on photographing moving objects. I stood out in our front yard and panned the passing traffic like a cop with a radar gun. After that I made Jack kick Rocky's soccer ball so I could follow the chase with my camera.

Also on this week's agenda, Howard is trying to get us to "see the light." No doubt for some of us that will be more difficult than for others. Early this morning I froze my fingers in minus 15 degree weather, trying to capture the sunrise. And loving it. Yep, there's a lot to be learned in a photography class – and not all of it is about taking pictures.

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it. It seems unfair to me. Suffering for what I can trace makes sense to me. Suffering for the untraceable is just hard.

She cried out to me and said, "Rod, could you please set up some

chairs again?"

But there are no chairs to set up. I can't make it better. Big brother is as helpless as his little sister.

I recognize that she is as unworthy of grace as am I. Still, I

will plead for it. And because she cries out for it, I will too. I'm not looking for chairs. I just want to watch her dance. Dear God, please make it so.

Church

Teacups, clusters and covenants

David Snapper

Wilhelmina Gretchen stretched full-height once again balancing the third and final China tea cup on the tips of her fingers as she nudged it towards its resting place in the mahogany case from Hong Kong.

Mother had warned Gretchen to stand on a stool, a good and sturdy stool such as the one on the summer porch. But Gretcha was preoccupied with the meeting that had come abruptly to a close just an hour earlier.

Pastor "just Bob" and the other pastors had decided LandsEnd CRC's funding future. Gretcha struggled with the merits of the decision, the message to LandsEnd and the theological merits of the Grounds for the decision. Gretcha, of course, was not a philosopher and so she framed her concerns in the modest metaphor of the farm.

While Gretcha was remembering the childhood farm and the original cupboard where her precious heirloom cups had been tucked away the previous 100 years, she first lost her concentration and then lost her delicate fingertip control over this third cup.

In the last second Gretcha heard her mother's admonition about the neglected stool. She anticipated the shattering of a priceless family heirloom. She heard Mary's silent sorrow as the original set of eight cups would be reduced to two – due to Gretcha's absent-mindedness.

But above the anticipated sounds, Gretcha heard one most unusual. She heard herself say, *That's it! Yes, I've got it now!* – not meaning that she had regained control over the cup, but, rather, that she finally understood the feelings roiling her heart and soul these past three years.

Ever since young Pastor Bob had left Iowa and returned home to Center City, Gretcha's troubling thoughts had multiplied. Pastor Bob's arrival at Center City and the startup of the new church on the edge of town with the silly name turned the feelings to frustration and bitterness. When goofy pastor De Klinker went "Hawaiian" on them last year in honor of a "one of dem California preachers," the nightmares began. What would happen next? It was LandsEnd that happened next. And then Mary became an Elder and forced her to discuss all of these issues every Sunday after church.

It put Gretcha over the edge.

But in that instant, with the precious cup poised on her fingertips, its eternal destiny caught in this balance, Gretcha found relief and comfort for the three years of brooding. At last, God had given her the answer.

I wrote this biographic bit because I know that you have been concerned for poor Gretcha. It's true that Gretcha was raised in the Netherlands before emigrating to Canada after the horrors of the war made the Home Country unlivable for her parents. She eventually inherited the family's Ontario farm and later sold acres for housing

and to buy a business in town. Gretcha had worshiped with Old First Church in Center City for decades now.

And, yes, Gretcha experienced some acid reflux just thinking about all her friends and their children who now worshiped in the edge-of-town church with sister Mary.

Even Mary did not know how lonely it was for Gretcha. Gretcha had never married, and she had many close friends, and her activities and her retail business in town kept her more than occupied with inventory and employees.

But Gretcha *was* lonely, very lonely. And even though Gretcha and I are close friends, and we discussed this article by telephone before I wrote it, I fear that I will expose Gretcha to some embarrassment if I share anything more. For the record, Gretcha does not live in northern Ontario, though she does live in Canada.

And the cup – that 27-gram China cup, as light as a feather, with delicate hand-painted Asian letters in 24 karat Gold still intact on the bottom of each cup, the unlikely survivor of nearly 200 years of family travel and trauma – the cup was transformed in Gretcha's mind into a symbol of Old First, and LandsEnd, and poor Dominee DeKlinker out at First Lesterville, and even of the new suburban church.

It's obvious to you, isn't it? What Gretcha is thinking and feeling, I mean.

Where we are going in this article

In this article I want to summarize the *Rules of the Cluster* – just a short summary to remind you of the previous articles. Following the summary we will (finally) look at the *factors that may cause a cluster to be such a positive environment for churches* – especially new churches.

Rules of the Cluster

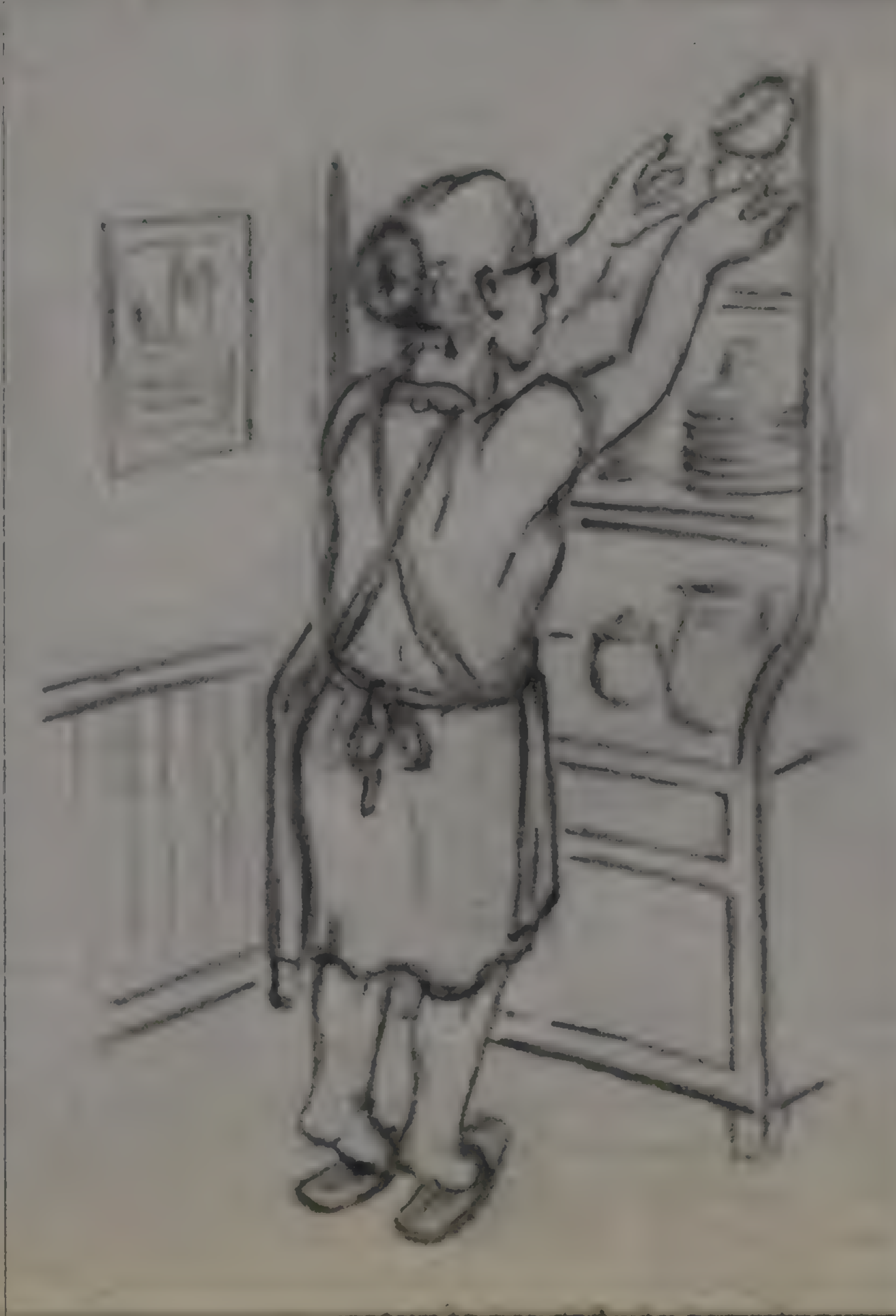
Below are some key rules governing membership sizes and growth rates in the CRC. These articles employed a variety of research techniques: large-scale samples from CRCNA, longitudinal studies, and studies by classis type and community type. Whatever the strategy for research the results have shown the following.

Most (at least 80 per cent) CRCs that reach 200 members are located in a cluster of CRC congregations.

Coincidentally, more than 80 per cent of our new churches that are planted in a cluster quickly reach 200 members in size, normally 400 or more.

However, a single congregation in isolation from a cluster has a likelihood of at least 75 per cent of not reaching 200 members in as long as 25 years.

Sometimes, through the vagaries of history and immigrant settlement, we have *isolated clusters* in North America. These clusters can be understood as a solar system held together by "gravity." The Center City Churches are the sun and the outlying



Perhaps you have created some hypotheses of your own while reading these articles. I hope so, especially for churches in Canada. My antique software and my old data do not allow mapping in the Canadian Postal Code System. Certainly there are more "rules of the cluster" to be explored.

These are some descriptions of what I want you to feel after reading these articles:

I hope that you who have a role in planting churches will consider this research before planting another remote church such as LandsEnd CRC. Make sure that you have a twenty-year commitment, not a twenty-month commitment.

Years ago I heard an audio tape in which a leading church planter summarized his experiences in these words: "I felt sent-out... and

churches are the smaller planets.

Similarly, a classis normally maintains a stable membership size even though individual congregations in the classis vary significantly.

Inside the cluster most membership "growth" is transfer of existing members from one congregation to another. Most growth, therefore, is the shuffling of members from a decreasing congregation to one which is increasing in size.

Though we have not discussed evangelism at length, the simple summary is that evangelism growth is a small factor in the growth of most CRC's.

Congregations which had the highest numbers of converts were as likely to be large as small. In other words, it is equally difficult or easy to do evangelism inside the cluster as outside the cluster.

CRCNA has experimented with growth and evangelism programs such as Kennedy's "Evangelism Explosion" and then "Evangelism Thrust." We had large nucleus and small nucleus starts, telemarketing, seeker sensitivity, direct mailing and some others. Alpha Course and the NCD survey. Of course, in earlier decades we sent missionaries to track down Dutch immigrants and draw them into our churches. All of this has been interesting but of very little measurable benefit. Let's be candid: the programs have not produced strong churches outside of the cluster.

What has worked most effectively for both church planting and for reaching the unchurched with the Gospel is working in and near the established cluster.

abandoned." Don't let that happen.

It is my dearest hope that church planters in isolated communities who struggle to reconcile the glorious promises of the "experts" with the modest reality of their ministry experience will draw comfort from this information. You're not the only one.

And to the many pastors and congregations inside of the clusters – well, God bless you also. I can't imagine what it is like inside the cluster, but if God put you there it will be a challenge!

These have been some of our findings from the *Yearbooks you never knew*. Virtually everything I've written about is available in the *Yearbooks*. This is hard, quantitative data and is based on reliable *Yearbook* reports. I avoided subjective research questionnaires and personal anecdote to make the case. Every chart and table came straight from the *Yearbooks*, and a few stories came from Gretcha – and she is an honest woman! I believe that you can count on this information and these summary rules as an accurate description of our recent patterns of church membership growth.

Now, with that summary out of the way, let's look at what goes on inside the Cluster to make it such an effective church-planting, membership-growing environment.

How the cluster builds strong bodies for Christ

We will consider five dynamics of the cluster that may be the most important reasons that clusters are the location of most growing congregations.

- It acts like Acts
- The wise old country preacher story

Church

- c. Follow the money
- d. The "Where there's smoke there's fire" factor
- e. The Rodney Dangerfield factor and LandsEnd CRC

a. It acts like Acts

Much earlier I reported that the book of Acts compares closely to the experience of CRCNA. I repeat that. I urge you to read the book of Acts with "clusters" in mind.

— Jerusalem is a mega-cluster, comparable to west Michigan.

— Antioch in East Turkey is an isolated cluster — a large Jewish church in a secular city.

— Athens is a truly isolated congregation — even the Jews didn't show-up for Mars Hill.

In Jerusalem, there were 3,000 converts the first day when Peter preached. Why? Because the cluster was present in the Temple — the money, the excitement, the High Holy Day, the Spirit of God in the lives of thousands and thousands of pilgrims to the Holy City. Miracles were performed and Peter was able to speak in the most prominent pulpit in the world. Immediately, household churches and churches-in-synagogues formed. We imagine that many dozens of churches were started within a few weeks.

Let's move a few hundred miles to the north — to Antioch. Paul and Barnabas visited the town and spoke in the synagogue, not the Temple. Maybe a few hundred show up for worship — definitely not thousands. Paul gave a sermon very much like Peter's, and the crowd was pleased and willing to hear more the next week. No explosion of converts, just curiosity. The next week the Jews and the Gentiles appeared for worship. The Gospel divided the church. The church was divided before it was started. This experience of "split" is the "fragmentation" we discussed in an earlier article.

Let's move another several hundred miles west — to Athens. Paul, now the seasoned speaker, addressed — not the thousands in the Temple, not the hundreds in the synagogue in Antioch — but secular philosophers in Athens at a pagan shrine. There were not thousands of converts, maybe not a dozen. In fact, the philosophers laughed. Then walked away. There was no church split because there was no church to split.

Isn't it a worthwhile comparison? Athens is not Jerusalem when it comes to church planting. Praise God that churches will arrive and thrive in Athens, but they won't be like those in Jerusalem. And Fort McMurray, Alberta will never be quite like Holland, Michigan. Why? Because the Jerusalem environment is literally jammed with people historically prepared to hear and understand the Christian message.

The cluster is unique. It's sheer mass cannot be replicated outside the cluster. The ability to spontaneously assemble thousands occurs only in clusters.

b. The wise old country preacher story

Do you remember the story of the wise old preacher who visited the parishioner who came to worship about once a year? The preacher went to the old parishioner's house and had an inspiration: he tipped a log off the fireplace grate and into a corner all by itself.

Wise preacher asked, "So, how long will the isolated log continue to burn?"

The parishioner replied, "Well, not long, preacher! To keep a fire going you need two or three or four logs together!"

The wise preacher concluded, "Yep, and that's why you need to go to church to worship each week."

Why do we think that isolated congregations can stay spiritually strong and vibrant?

Let me ask you a few questions that are so silly that you may think I've lost my focus. Please, humor me.

Q: What would happen if you could wave a magic wand and lift Calvin College from Grand Rapids, Michigan and plunk it down in swampiest, buggiest backwoods section Bayou County, Louisiana?

A: Calvin would die in one year like a fish out of water.

Q: Or, what would happen to the enrollment of Dordt or Kings or Trinity if you transplanted the schools to downtown Mexico City next autumn?

A: The current supportive constituency would choose another school for their kids. After a heroic effort to market their school in Mexico City the Trustees would sell the building and move home.

Q: What would happen if you planted a new and vulnerable church in the middle of an environment where its nearest support was a two-hour's drive away?

A: When the fragmentation crisis hits, and it will, about 75 per cent of those congregations will enter a premature membership plateau. Some will fail outright and many of them will require one or two decades to resume growth. Let's be clear: most pastors and most congregations need the support and strength of a nearby congregation to survive the "Antioch-style" fragmentation that occurs on a regular basis.

The cluster is unique. Only in the cluster can elders from neighboring churches compare notes at the John Deere spring pancake feed. And next Monday at the café. Those conversations help to keep the spiritual fires burning brightly in the cluster.

The cluster is unique because the spiritual fire of each congregation can spill over to empower nearby congregations.

c. Follow the money

I know that some of you have bitten your tongues to not say anything catty about my too-many charts and graphs. Charts and statistics are not very spiritual. The only thing worse is money. So let's talk about money!

Clusters are empowered by the flow of money that comes to the cluster. Schools, teacher salaries, larger congregations, and cluster-wide events are some ways in which money flows to the cluster. Cluster churches almost always are larger in size with larger budgets.

Money is energy — the ability to make things happen.

More money means, perhaps, a full-time youth pastor for the Center City church. And a full-time youth pastor means more youth, more music and noise and even more youth. Teens will travel to the Center City church for a special youth program. Before long the children want to worship at Center City and not in Lesterville. They marry and stay in the larger churches of the cluster.

In earlier years the worth of a church was related to the size of its pipe organ. Years ago, congregational anniversary booklets routinely featured photos of a huge pipe organ along with the prime musicians. It was an attraction to potential members.

Whatever the newest status symbol may be you can find it inside the cluster. But not in the outlying congregations which are smaller and have less money.

The cluster is unique because it is the beneficiary of the net flow of money. That money flow empowers the cluster to generate additional energy and ministry, often for its own benefit.

d. The "Where there's smoke there's fire" factor

Where there's smoke there's fire. Inside a cluster of 4,000 CRC people there is a lot of friction, heat, smoke and fire. Especially on Sunday afternoons.

Fire and smoke signal that some serious chemistry is taking place.

Inside the cluster, churches interact, create drama, compete, support, take an interest in one another. Pray for one another. When one has an important anniversary it is likely that surrounding churches will participate in the celebration.

The chemistry that takes place might be the daily interactions of two parishioners of different churches comparing youth programs and swapping ideas about eldering.

Or Old First may send money to the Inner-City Shelter while a suburban congregation takes two vanloads of people to paint and repair Gold Avenue Chapel one weekend. An inner-city church may send its youth choir to lead worship in the suburbs.

Cluster college professors are an easy drive from nearby churches, and the colleges actively promote the idea that professors are available to give lectures in local churches.

Hope College plays Calvin College in an in-cluster rivalry that generates enthusiasm, support for the respective schools and, perhaps, a little good fellowship. Talk about smoke and fire!

The population of Kent and Ottawa

Counties (Michigan) is about 800,000 persons. The CRC population within those counties is about 60,000. Therefore, about one person in twelve is a member of a CRC. Imagine all the encounters in the grocery stores and car dealers each day. This same logic is true in many place from Michigan to Ontario.

Things "happen" inside the cluster — things that stir the thousands of CRC people inside the cluster — at least because of the constant interactions of the cluster. That activity generates attention and focus towards the cluster and constantly pulls people and money, time and ministry into the cluster.

The Cluster is unique because of its interactions. The sheer frequency of CRC-sponsored events creates its own environment.

e. The Rodney Dangerfield factor and the LandsEnd CRC

My first Dutch word was "onze." It means "our." To our forebears *onze* meant a lot more than the simple English adjective *our*.

Onze spoke of identity and respect and honor and belonging and community and covenant, and esprit de corps: "Give me Gereformeerde or give me death!"

Onze symbolized mutual respect and honor or that was found only inside the Cluster.

Our fathers knew the power and the necessity of all that *onze* stood for. They fought together (at least if the archived copies *Banners* tell the story accurately) always believing that it was *onze* churches and schools and communities that would be faithful together until Jesus' return.

In the older *Yearbooks* the word *onze* is a regular feature because honor was so important to our fathers. Similarly, *Necrologies* honored deceased preachers. Printed names of churches, pastors, and leaders honored their roles within the community. The 1903 *Yearbook* even includes a head-count of all the children in *Catechisaties en Zondagscholen* because these children represent God's covenant and *onze* future. (Roseland 1 in Chicago had 260 catechism students. Muskegon had 400! Hold on — Holland 1 had 600 catechism students that year.)

The same *Yearbook* tells us the leaders of the *Vrouwen Vereenigingen*: Mrs. J. Clouzing led the group in Roseland 1. How did she feel to be among the many women honored by name for their leadership? Honored and respected.

Respect. Respect changes things, especially people. Rodney Dangerfield ("I don't get no respect") played fringe characters in his acting career. However, respect creates power and authority and, often, the success that moves people forward.

Where is respect today?

Who is respected?

If you were planting a church would you

Continued on page 16...

Ecclesiastes

Without beauty there is only weariness

*A fool's work wears him;
he does not know the way to town.*
Ecclesiastes 10:15

A.A. van Ruler

In the Preacher's perspective everyone is caught up in endless toil. Although they are foolish, fools have to work. Although they are wise, the wise too have to work. When it comes down to it, there is no one who doesn't have to work.

They may not all work in the same way, of course. Everyone works in his or her own way. One person does so to make lots of money, another to exert power and influence, a third to keep up with others. Some work in the sciences, others devote themselves to the arts. This person is in quest of happiness, while that one is motivated by religion.

Everyone is in pursuit of something. We all want to achieve something, and to do so we exert ourselves to the utmost. That's what human work is all about.

Now and again we are stopped by the thought that there must be more to it. We wonder whether work is something we impose on ourselves because we are chasing after something or whether it is something that is imposed on us — part of the human condition. Isn't existence itself a burden that we must bear and a heavy labor? There are billions of us human beings and we all labor under the heavy task of simply being or existing.

In this passage the Preacher points out that the vexing thing of all this work is not the work itself. In itself exertion is good. It strengthens us. The exertions of life steel the muscles of the spirit. Such exertion can even give us pleasure. A life of idleness quickly becomes boring. Most of us would agree that it is a wonderful thing that we and our deeds are enlisted in history and reality — and even in God's government of the world. We have genuinely been given something to do in this world.

So in itself work is a good thing. But the work of the fool is wearisome and exhausting. Ultimately it will kill him. He will work himself into the ground. And why? Simply because he doesn't know the way to town.

Although he works hard, he has no idea why. He doesn't know the purpose, the goal, the meaning of life. He has no idea where he's going, and so he has no idea why he's working. This also means that he doesn't have the faintest idea how to channel his exertions so that they will achieve their proper goal. He toils away mindlessly. His work totally absorbs him. He knows nothing beyond his work. He is not able to put it in a larger context so that he can oversee its purpose. All he does is work. And this is what wears him.

There are several different elements touched on here. There is, first of all, the element of fruitlessness. In our folly we exert huge amounts of effort without producing anything worthwhile. We don't get anywhere ourselves either. Our labors amount to nothing because they have no purpose. It all seems to be work for work's sake. This makes us look ludicrous — to expend all that effort for nothing. The Preacher points this out by saying that it is



Christian on his way to Celestial City

the way of the fool.

But is this way of life confined to those who are fools? Are there others who are wise and who do know the way to town and whose work is not wearisome? Or must we admit that this is not just true for the fool but that it is true of everyone, of mankind as such, for we are all fools?

I strongly suspect that the Preacher may have entertained some such notion. Isn't all of human life stamped by such ludicrous fruitlessness and sterility? To echo Paul, aren't we all like slaves subject to the futility of existence and therefore also to corruption, mortality and alienation?

These tones become even darker when the Preacher adds another element to that of fruitlessness. He says that all that work undertaken by fools is really fruitless from the start. How, then, could it possibly produce results?

He doesn't know the way to town. He doesn't know the future. He doesn't know his destination or goal. He doesn't have the faintest idea how the road leads to it, so he can't direct his efforts in that direction. He simply exerts himself, but not in a way that produces any results.

Man is blind. We are lost in a dense wood, and it is a dark night. We grope about in the trees and thrash about in the underbrush. But all we do in the end is walk around in a big circle.

In this connection it is important to note that the Preacher says that it is the fool who is worn out by his work.

and experienced as part of the Kingdom of God.

Those who bow before the authority of revelation are no longer fools. They are wise. They have become street-wise. Then, too, they are no longer worn down by their work. They know the way to town and therefore stride purposefully. The Bible calls this holiness. It is the opposite of weariness, darkness and despair. Holiness is the realization that life is worth living, that it has purpose, that history has meaning and that I can exert myself to do my part in realizing this meaning.

This is, perhaps, the simplest thing of all. The Preacher draws on a figure of speech in which knowing the way to town stands for knowing the most elementary thing.

But holiness is the most beautiful thing in the world. We might even say that true holiness (clinging to the meaning of life which we have received on authority) and true beauty coincide. All beauty is essentially holiness.

But then we must also remember that the New Testament says that this holiness — the law, the world as the Kingdom of God — has only been fully realized in the Messiah, in Jesus. He has rescued us from the bottomless futility of foolish existence. He has restored the fullness of meaning to human life.

He did this through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. There was no easier way to solve the problem of our foolishness. But this is also the way that leads to beauty — the beauty of the new Jerusalem, the city of God.

This leaves the door open a crack so we see a thin stroke of light. Might we be able to work wisely? Suppose someone knows something of the purpose of the world, of the ultimate goal of history, of the meaning of life and of the way to direct his actions toward the goal?

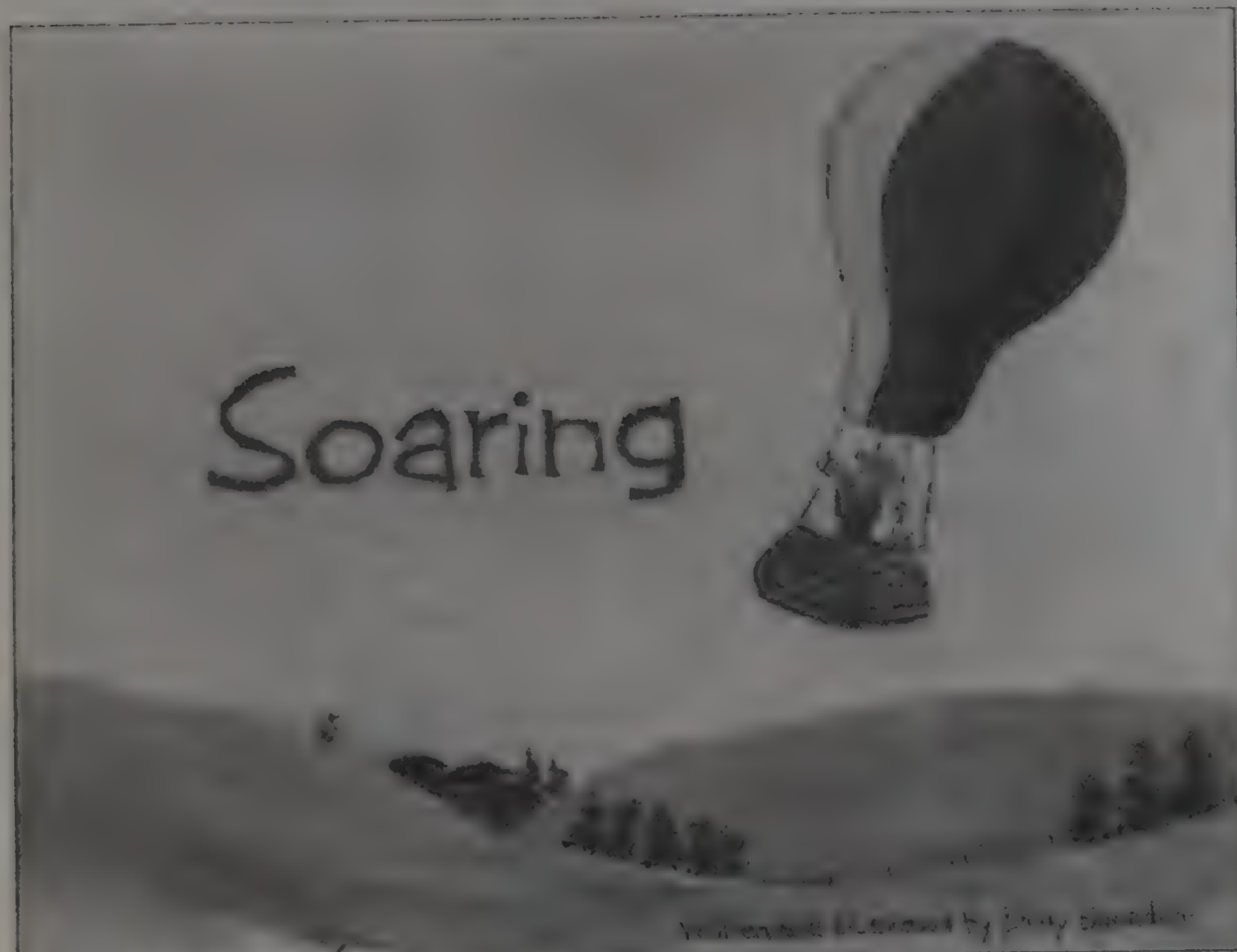
What was the Preacher thinking of when he left the door open a crack? He could have been thinking of only one thing, as I see it. In the middle of this world's darkness, there is the light of revelation. Israel received the law of God, so it knows the good. It knows to keep its eyes on the Ten Commandments.

We cannot know what the good is in and of ourselves. Even in retrospect we have trouble seeing that the good is good. We depend on authority to tell us. When it comes to knowing the good, we have not come of age.

Even our consciences cannot show us the purpose of the world and the path of life. We need revelation and the law. These sketch for us a picture of life and of the world in which these can be seen

Education

Student art books go to Ugandan orphans



Soaring by student Emily Benedict features Giuseppe's world travels



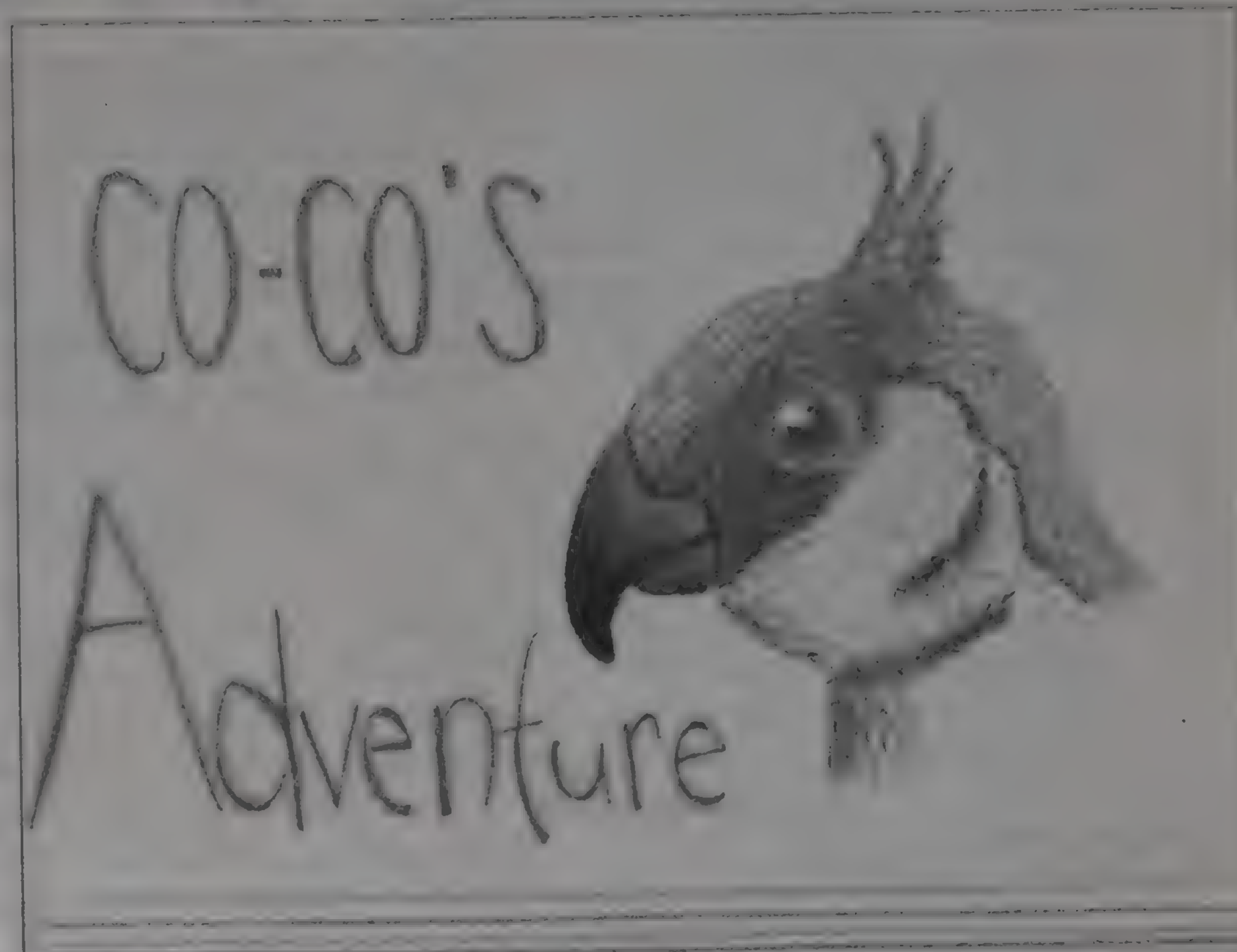
Giuseppe visits Italy in an 18th-century View of Santa Maria Della Salute by Guardi

Ancaster – Sixteen students in Grade 11 Art at Hamilton District Christian High School created books for Ugandan children aged 4 - 8. Responding to an ad from Project Hope in *School Arts Magazine*, art teacher Erna de Vries challenged her students to create children's books for children in refugee camps and orphanages.

Each student created an imaginary character who travels the world. The character shows up in art works from various cultures and times in art history. Each bound book has at least six pages, and is geared to open up the world of art with a simple story line appropriate for children.

"But that is challenging to do," says de Vries. "The students have to tie their art to story telling, and children's imagination."

The students interpreted works from artists as diverse as Van Gogh, Dali, Kurelek and Hiroshige. Students are learning that art can bring hope and comfort, that the artist can consider bringing benefit to others. Project Hope is an international relief organization, meeting needs of displaced people in over 30 countries.



Co-Co's Adventure by student Jenna Bos



Co-co chats with Picasso's The Guitarist

Global warming report...continued from page 10

Dig in with what you can do

Though global warming sounds like such a huge problem, and it seems as though no one can possibly make a difference, the situation is quite the opposite. Individuals, let alone churches and temples and mosques, can make a huge difference. Just do the simple things:

- Replace incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescents. Though initially more expensive, an energy-efficient fluorescent bulb will save you \$28 to \$58 in your electric bill during its life and burn 500 pounds less coal to pollute the air!

- Recycle. C'mon: How hard can it be?
- Drive the speed limit with properly inflated tires and a tuned engine. Make your mom worry less.

- Ask for your energy company to do an energy audit on your house or church to tell you how you can lower your electric bills. You'll make money and be giving to others at the same time!

- Support businesses that are environmentally friendly.

- Vote and voice your concern about protecting the environment to government officials and those you are electing. I have no specific legislation to recommend, but you will know it when you see it!

- Pray that people and congregations and governments will do what is wise to care for the creation.

Diversify your interests

People can get so fixated on one issue that they become like a "noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." A fanatic has been defined as one who won't change his mind and won't let you change the subject. The environmental issue can become a substitute religion. Our faith has to do with obeying God and loving our neighbor. Hugging trees is not the point. Creation care is important to many Biblical themes we need to address, including sanctity of life, disease, poverty, and conflict.

Some conservative Christians have been reluctant to get involved with creation care because they think it belies some sort of failure of belief that God is going to take care of us. Of course those same Christians don't expect God to change their baby's dirty diaper (pray all you want, it's still your job). Caring for the Earth is not a lack of faith; it is an act of faith. Faith guides us to do what is good for others, knowing that the results are ultimately up to God.

Scientists and Evangelicals together

I and other evangelical Christians teamed up with some of the leading scientists in America last month to declare how faith and science can complement each other to accomplish a common cause. Evangelicals need the scientists' facts; scientists need the evangelical constituency to participate in a solution. Each addresses a different aspect of the same challenge: science addresses the "what" and faith addresses the "why."

Before I act, I need to know the facts and possible solutions. The "why," though, is what compels me to action.

Government, business, and science bring unique assets to help with global problems, but nothing motivates like religion. Cooperative work on the environment may prove to be a gateway to resolving other important issues such as peace, poverty, and human rights. Perhaps faith communities will begin as a matter of course to work with governments and businesses and scientists. I am convinced that no global problem will be solved in the future without grass-roots participation motivated by values, and worshiping congregations provide the most effective leadership to shape values.

• Joel C. Hunter, a senior pastor of Northland, is author of *Right Wing, Wrong Bird: Why the Tactics of the Religious Right Won't Fly With Most Conservative Christians*.

Church

Teacups, clusters and covenants...continued from p. 13

want it to have the attention and the respect of a surrounding cluster? Or would you want it 100 miles from its nearest support?

A cluster is unique because it can generate respect and therefore create motivational power and resources. The cluster creates value by the fact of its existence.

It's been a long journey

The editor of *Christian Courier* took a risk publishing these articles about Teacups and *Yearbooks*, especially since the first article promoting *Yearbooks* was even rejected by the publisher of the *Yearbooks*! It's like a baby so ugly even its mother doesn't love it. But Harry was gracious (although he forgot to attach the author's name to the previous installment) and here we are.

After my many "rejection" notices I felt that I needed to take a few pages to establish myself with the readers. After all, most of you have never heard of me and likely will not hear of me again. So, this is it.

In preparation for these articles I've submitted over 100 pages. By the time Harry hacked and whacks and shrinks my lovely charts down to size, we're a lot smaller. Even so, I've assembled 100 pages of original text, nearly thirty years of research, a D.Min. degree, and hundreds of hours of bean-counting so that I can tell you what I am about to tell you.

I believe that it is possible, by the grace of God, to use the power and energy of the cluster to help isolated congregations to grow more quickly and more reliably into self-sustaining ministry centers. In other words, I believe it is possible to improve our rate of success in planting new churches. I believe that the local churches can share some of their spiritual vitality with other churches – even those outside the cluster – to create strength in the isolated churches.

Earlier I explained that Seattle is forming a "synthetic cluster" which may develop into a sizable group of churches. This happens, I believe, when the pastors and leaders decide that their high goal is to work together as co-laborers in the city. Honor and respect are being created by the decision to honor and respect one another – in contrast to competing with one another.

Since writing that earlier section on Seattle's synthetic cluster I have heard of a few additional areas creating such clusters of mutual ministry respect that empower all the members towards stronger ministry.

Let me share one personal example of how your church can work to create value and worth in a needy congregation. This is my story.

I experienced two ministry-saving events (that I am allowed to tell you about) in my twenty-three years in Silverdale, WA, a truly isolated congregation.

When we experienced our *Fragmentation* that led to our *Premature Membership Plateau* (ca 1990), I could feel the energy and

vitality drain out of the congregation. Worth drained away. People were hurt deeply and unjustly. I was overcome with dismay.

Then Second Lynden came to our rescue. And the San Diego CRC came to our rescue. The details do not matter. What matters is that both of those congregations were and are still the home to the very small family that I have.

Humanly speaking, they gave us the spiritual sense of worth to help us continue.

That act, the act of honoring and respecting a church that is about to go under, is what I see as the role of the cluster. The cluster is where you matter to someone who can help you when you need it. The cluster is where you are allowed to help someone else when they need help. The cluster is where every church and every member has an identity and a role.

That's a scrap of my story. Think of the great Apostle Paul when he told his lukewarm friends in Corinth that "he felt the sentence of death" in his heart. He had lost the drive and energy and vision to continue. Then, he reports, "You helped us with your prayers."

I am trying to say what Paul experienced: the Corinthians were the human agents who gave Paul the honor and respect of their prayers and even their wavering affection that was enough to change his life.

Respect is that important to people. You may take it for granted if you've enjoyed it all your life. But when you're all alone in the dungeon, you really are desperate to have a friend like Timothy who will bring your warm coat.

The cluster has the power to create love and respect and honor that ultimately come from the love of God.

I hope it is OK to say that Dr. John Bolt (Calvin Seminary) critiqued an early copy of one of these articles. His summary word that I recall was – "covenant": because he has a great theological mind he saw a theological meaning – covenant.

Covenant

Covenant. Remember Lot? Abraham's nephew Lot was safe until he escaped the covenant circle of Abraham's influence and went to Sodom. When we get out of the cluster we easily move into trouble.

Another time Abraham saw his covenant role as that of using his army to retrieve Lot and his household. Obviously I am suggesting that Abraham is like the cluster and Lot is the one isolated and in trouble.

The Covenant relationship is a community of people working together, under Christ (or Abraham) to be what God called them to be. Those in the strongest positions will use their strength on behalf of those in the weaker (isolated) positions. When that happens, God's work is accomplished magnificently.

The covenant at work is Ruth and Naomi's tough story. Oh, it sounds sweet,



3000 years later. But go back in time and the reality is that these two poor women were picking up little specks of grain just to survive. That's isolation! How fun is that? Then the Covenant kicks in and Boaz sees that as an insider his job is to care for the fringe relatives. Then the isolated, foreign woman is included in the safety of God's people. God did phenomenal things with that covenant vision.

Covenant has thousands of concrete, historical applications.

I think that Dr. Bolt meant me to tell you that this safe, strong, healthy environment is what God planned for us. And when we leave the boundaries of the covenant cluster our greatest comfort must be that someone back home in the cluster loves us enough to make it worth coming home.

The Prodigal Son, foolish, reckless, and out of the safety of his spiritual cluster comes to his senses and dares to believe that someone inside the cluster will take him back. Amazingly, it is his Father who still loves him.

The cluster has the power to represent the Father's life-changing grace and respect. Clothed in the Father's robe and honored with his ring, the wayward son comes home to find his place again.

Don't blow your chance to represent the Father.

A word about Greetcha

I wish I could tell you that Greetcha found an extra two centimeters of stretch to tip the cup back into its case. It was not so. The precious cup, one of three surviving cups of the magnificent set that her oldest known relative had brought to the Netherlands so proudly after his first voyage to Hong Kong, rolled over the back of Greetcha's hand. It accelerated downward only to land on Greetcha's shoulder.

As she turned her head in amazement at this blessing her chin shoved the cup off her shoulder and over her back.

She thought of Elder De Vries in that instant, alone at LandsEnd, watching the church crumble. Passions that rarely motivated Greetcha welled-up from somewhere deep in her soul as she saw the ancient Chinese letters on the bottom of the cup, because in that instant of time her eyes played tricks on her. The Chinese letters, written in pure Gold, upside down, spelled, "De Vries."

Sure, it was an optical illusion. But no matter. Her precious "De Vries cup" was rolling off her shoulder over her rounded back and towards the floor.

Gravitational attraction and acceleration being what they are in Greetcha's part of Canada, the cup's life expectancy from her shoulder to the floor was about 0.4 seconds, give or take a little for the rolling across the shoulder. By the time Greetcha whirled around to face her cup she already had lost 0.2 seconds and the "De Vries Cup" was traveling about 3 meters per second towards the kitchen floor, now about 0.5 meters away.

Gold letters from the bottom of the tiny cup flashed up at Greetcha – "De Vries! De Vries!"

Without so much as an eye's blink Greetcha's sturdy leather shoe flew forward and she lifted her foot directly into the path of the falling cup.

Amazing – "Miraculously!" I would say, but "amazing" was Greetcha's own description – the cup landed right-side-up on her toe and came to rest there, totally and completely unharmed. Not even scratched.

For ten seconds Greetcha neither breathed nor moved as she surveyed the miraculous rescue of the De Vries Teacup.

I should say that this was the "near" rescue of the Elder De Vries Teacup because Greetcha's catch was still a full 38 centimeters above the floor. As Greetcha grasped the danger of her clumsy predicament it seemed that she was neither steady enough to lower her foot to the floor safely nor flexible enough to reach down, balancing on her other foot, to rescue the cup.

Greetcha, as she began to become unsteady from the unusual muscle strain, pursed her lips, focused her considerable powers on the cup and said, in Dutch, "Come here, little teacup. You have belonged in this set for 200 years. You will not break today."

THE END

NOTE: The Snapper series of yearbook articles are available on our website: www.christiancourier.ca and click on feature articles.

Uniting/Dividing

New organization aims to unite five Christian 'families'

'Christian Churches Together in the USA' launches with 36 denominations and more than 100 million churchgoers represented.

Jane Lampman (CSM)

In a time of deep religious division and tension, many American churches are joining in a fresh bid for greater Christian unity. After five years of discussion and prayer, church leaders met in Pasadena, Calif., in the official launch of an ecumenical body – Christian Churches Together in the USA (CCT). Its mission: "to grow closer together in Christ in order to strengthen our Christian witness in the world."

In its inclusiveness, CCT offers a striking contrast to religious dissension in the political arena. The group involves churches from all five Christian "families" – Catholics, Evangelicals and Pentecostals, Mainline Protestants, Orthodox, and racial or ethnic churches – and represents the broadest ecumenical fellowship ever formed in the U.S.

"Not everyone is in the tent, but it's a major step forward," says the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America and chair of CCT's steering committee. Thirty-six denominations and national organizations have joined, representing about 100 million churchgoers. Eighteen more groups are in the decision making process or participating as observers.

Recognizing that historical divisions have fostered misperceptions and even hostility, and that this has weakened Christian influence, the CCT seeks better understanding and a common voice on important societal issues.

And they aren't wasting time. The agenda for the three-day gathering focused on how the various "families" understand evangelism, and on reaching a consensus on a specific proposal for a poverty initiative.

"There is a strong realization that if we as Christians are to be effective in the world we need to be a common voice," says Bishop Stephen Blaire of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Stockton, Calif. "And addressing poverty is integral to the work and witness of being a Christian."

Ecumenism has a lengthy history in the United States. The National Council of Churches was founded in 1950 (a forerunner in 1908), and includes mainline Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican, and African-American denominations. But the Catholics never joined, and Evangelicals opted for their own National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), which made a rule that members could not also be part of the NCC.

The NCC has emphasized social justice issues, and many Evangelicals

have criticized them for being too liberal. The Evangelicals focused on bringing people to Christ and on matters of personal morality.

But times are a-changing, and signs of a new convergence are multiplying. Some prominent Evangelical leaders and churches have added HIV/AIDs and environmental concerns to their agendas.

"There's a large group of Evangelical and 'midway Christian' groups that are understanding we can't simply deal with what we used to call spiritual issues," says the Rev. Kurt Fredrickson, associate professor of ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., the largest multid denominational evangelical seminary in the U.S. "There's almost a holistic sense of who we are as people and how we are in the world, so we have to deal with poverty, injustice, and the environment."

The poverty initiative under consideration, which highlights child poverty, is likely to have a political component. CCT plans to hold its 2008 meeting in Washington, D.C. "That might be an occasion to speak to society and the political world and ask for some commitment on reducing child poverty," says Mr. Granberg-Michaelson.

Still, some Evangelical, Pentecostal, and African-American churches have shied from participating in CCT. The Southern Baptist Convention, the biggest US Protestant denomination, sent an observer to a couple of meetings, but has not signed on.

"It's amazing to get this representation [in CCT]," says Dr. Fredrickson. "Yet it's not a surprise that some Evangelical or charismatic groups aren't there, because many determine who's in and who's out on doctrinal issues. They stick to themselves."

CCT defines its theological criteria simply, welcoming any denomination or national group that worships the triune God and believes "in the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the Scriptures." The group also will take all its decisions by consensus.

National faith-based organizations, such as Bread for the World and World Vision, may join, but may not represent more than 20 percent of CCT.

"We have several Evangelical and Pentecostal groups that have not previously been involved who are very enthusiastic," says Granberg-Michaelson.

Bishop James Leggett of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church is one of the five CCT presidents. As for the largest Pentecostal churches,

Giving a "name" to late life divorces

The feminist movement increased the itchiness of marriage.... My soothing for the itch is the concept I call reciprocal empathy.

After a 60-year partnership, we give thanks for our life long monogamous marriage. We accept it...as a gift from God.

Now we have another dubious baby-boomer legacy: senior divorce. When is this generation ever going to grow up?

All quotes from MacLean's mail bag

The media literally pounced on the recent findings on late life divorces in North America.

Anna M. Owens of the *National Post* writes "She is a woman in her 80s, married for a half-century, a devoted, seemingly contented wife who one day decides she has had enough."

It is as simple as that...or so it seems. There is no secret affair, no mystery lover, no harboring of a lifetime of abuse or ill treatment... Rather, the octogenarian divorcee abandons the marriage because she 'could not go on living the same old life, in the same old rut, with the same old boring person.' To top it off, more and more women are initiating these divorces and leaving their husbands completely blindsided.

While surveys show more women than men leave their long marriages, men are also following this trend. According to Ms. Bair, author of *Calling it Quits: Late-Life Divorce and Starting Over*, both genders are divorcing their spouses after many years of marriage for intangibles such as "freedom," and "more control over their lives." She herself is divorced after 43 years of marriage but does not share her own story.

Stony indifference or mutual misery

When Ms. Bair was researching for her book she thought infidelity would be a big reason for divorce but found it to be a *lack of communication* and quotes Lillian Hellman who believes "people change and forget to tell each other." And so, "an indifference comes to pass, a lack of communication, a non-sharing of anything on any level. That seemed to inspire many people to say, 'there has to be something better, there has to be something different.'"

Gerontologist John Cavanaugh, president of the University of West Florida and author

of *the Church of God in Christ*, a historic predominantly black church, sent an observer, and a dialogue is under way with the Assemblies of God.

The launch of CCT was postponed a year in hopes of bringing historic black churches into the gathering. Two major African-American churches have joined, and a few others

are sending observers.

The Rev. William Shaw is president of the 7.5-million-member National Baptist Convention, USA Inc., which also belongs to NCC and the Baptist World Alliance. "This new thrust has a voice that is considered conservative in many ways, but it isn't the voice of what is the popular

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

of *Adult Development and Aging* also found couples no longer want to live out their final years imprisoned in stony indifference or mutual misery, which seems to be the reality of many long term relationships. He acknowledges years ago people would stick it out. Now divorce is more acceptable and can be seen as a new beginning.

I appreciate Ms. Bair's challenge to society that late life divorces is a serious cultural shift. I also appreciate her giving a "name" to the late divorce malady – "there has to be something better, there has to be something different." This may not necessarily be the whine of the wealthy or the petulant pout of the common folk but an expose of the reality of many long-term relationships. Consequently, the question needs to be asked: what brings us to this place of painful indifference and misery?

Lounging too long in an easy chair

Unfortunately, I am not surprised by the above findings. Marriage has been many things throughout the history of western civilization but only in the last few generations has the marital relationship been burdened with the unrelenting responsibility for emotional intimacy and personal fulfillment. This expectation is doomed to failure because not only are our scripts for marriage too limited, it traps people when they do not have the courage, creativity or resources to implement an alternative way of being (more on this in next month column). Furthermore, some of us are *unwilling* to walk the complex road of contemporary marital growth.

For instance, who could not help but notice in Ms. Bair's survey that those spouses who were blind-sided by their partners leaving became far more aware and careful of their behavior *after* their divorce! In other words, the shock of their spouse leaving finally forced them to look at themselves and take responsibility. And that is what late life divorces may be about – a last resort challenge for change.

Unfortunately, we may lounge too long in our easy chair and the hoped for reward: "Grow old with me...the best is yet to be" will only be a haunting wished-for memory.

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca

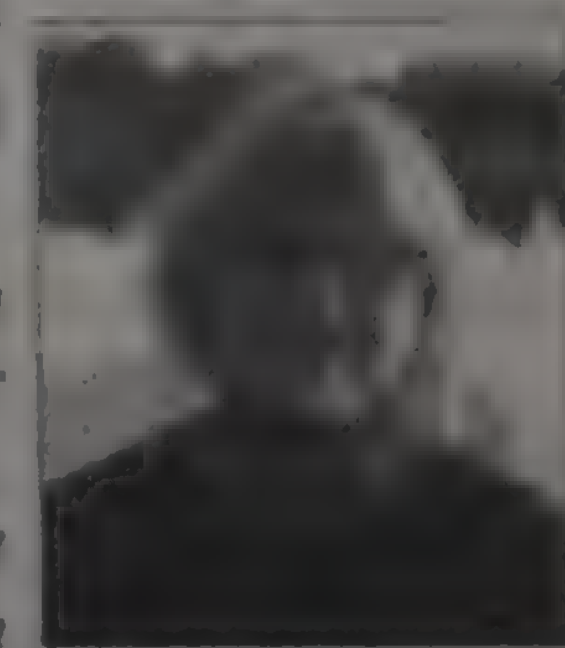
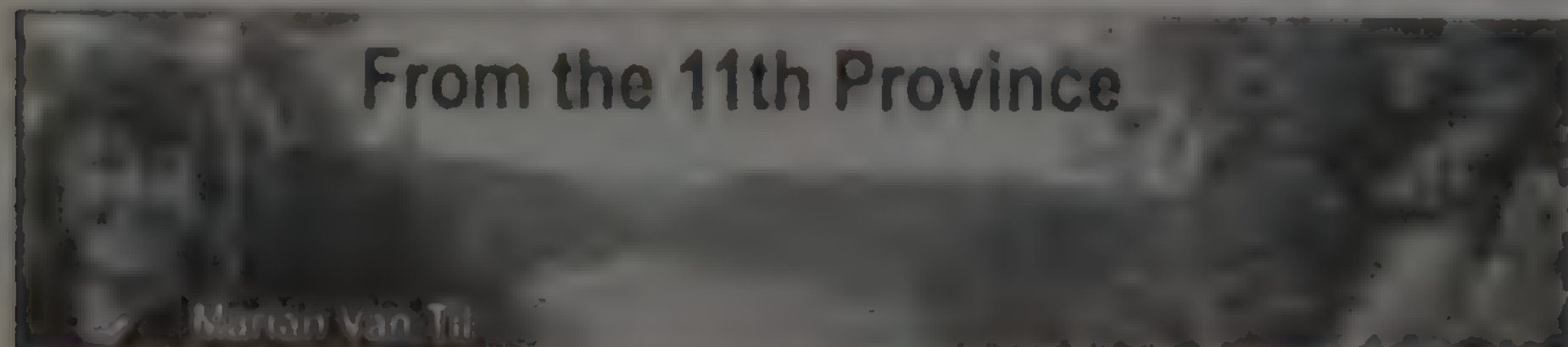


image of conservative evangelicalism," says Dr. Shaw, who is also a CCT president. "I'm hopeful this group will be a strong voice for the unity of the church, but also a strong voice for human rights and the addressing of inequities that have existed within our country for a long time."

From the 11th Province



George Herbert was born into the wealth and privilege that Briton's old aristocratic families could expect, but that couldn't prevent his father's dying when he was only four. Magdalen Herbert successfully raised her 10 children as a widow, choosing clever

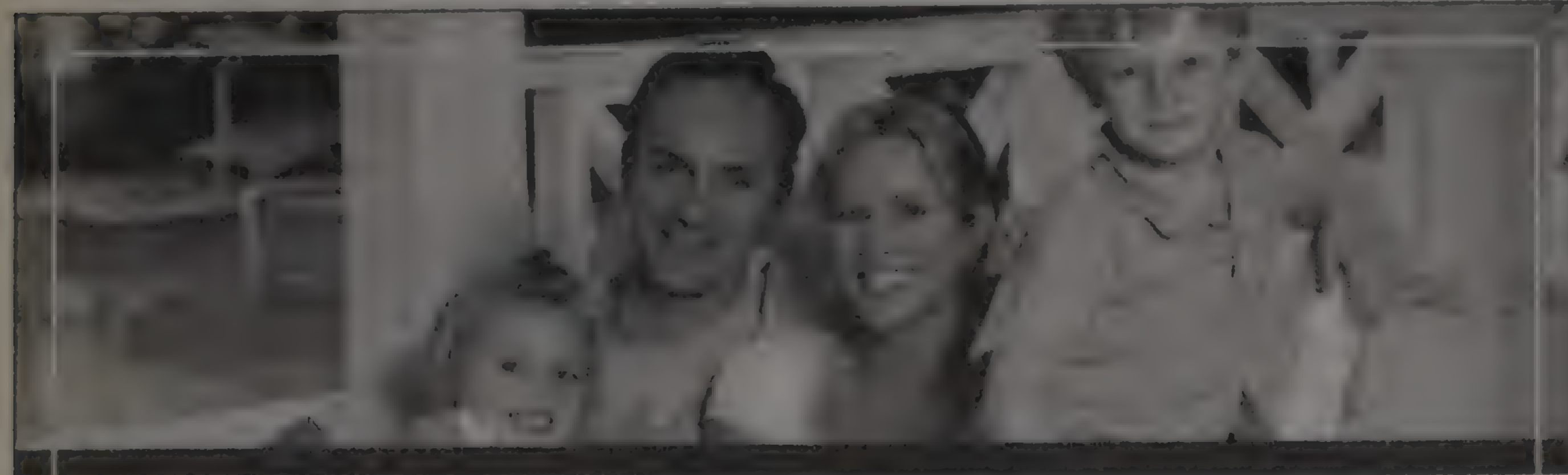
...For temporal afflictions, I beseech you consider, all that can happen to you are either afflictions of estate, or body, or mind. For those of estate, of what poor regard ought they to be? since, if we had riches, we are commanded to give them away: so that the best use of them is having, not to have them. But perhaps, be-

to extol thee

*This is the famous stone,
that turneth all to gold:
for that which God doth touch and own
cannot for less be told.*

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY; she may be contacted via e-mail at <mrvantil@adelphia.net>.

Classifieds



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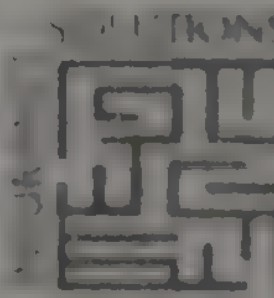
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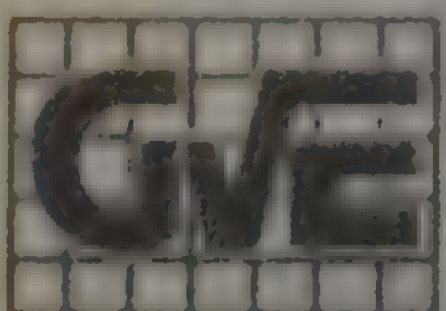
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Obituaries

GEORGE VANDERVELDE

June 20, 1939 - January 19, 2007

Although we prayed for the miracle of healing from the cancer that had invaded his body, the Lord called him home. He died peacefully in his sleep.

George attended Calvin College and Calvin Seminary. He earned his doctorate at the Free University in Amsterdam and then worked there. In 1977 he joined the faculty at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto where he taught systematic theology (later also at Wycliffe College). Gradually George moved into other areas, dealing with issues of ecclesiology, gospel and culture, and ecumenism.

George loved the Lord and the church of his Lord. On behalf of the Christian Reformed Church, he served on the Contemporary Testimony Committee, the Contemporary Testimony Revision Committee, and the ecumenical work regarding Q&A 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism. He has served on the Interchurch Relations Committee, the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, and worked toward increased dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church.

George's interests were wide and varied. He loved his wife and family. He was interested in both classical and contemporary music. He played guitar and sang. He was an avid windsurfer and biker, usually commuting downtown on two wheels. He had a keen wit, a great sense of humour, an engaging personality, and a great interest in people. George expressed his love for life in his photography.

Sadness and deep love remain in the hearts of:

Beatrice, his wife of 43 years

His children and grandchildren:

Jonathan Vandervelde & Mimi Bartleson – Levi, Caleb, Naomi, *Grand Rapids, MI*

Norman Vandervelde & Jeannie Merkel – Esther, *Ft. Collins, CO*

Steven & Jennifer Vandervelde, *Markham, ON*

Siblings and In-laws:

Jake & Tineke Vandervelde, *Edmonton, AB*

†Freda & Cor VanderVenne (Ellie), *Edmonton, AB*

Sandra & Dave Wilhem, *Spring Lake, AB*

Sid & Marie Greidanus, *Grand Rapids, MI*

Tom & Janet Greidanus, *Edmonton, AB*

Peter & Bette Greidanus, *Lethbridge, AB*

Harry Vandervelde & Margaret Witschl, *Edmonton, AB*

John & Karen Vandervelde, *Jackson, Mis.*

Janice & †Horace Baker, *Samia, ON*

Morris & Alice Greidanus, *Grand Rapids, MI*

Wilma & Vern Gleddie, *Edmonton, AB*

Helen & Gil Vergilio, *Surrey, BC*

and many nieces and nephews.

A memorial service was held on January 27 at the Willowdale CRC.

Correspondence address: B.C.Vandervelde, 3 Cathcart Street, Toronto ON M2M 1E8



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*Surely goodness and unfailing love
will pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I will live in the house of the Lord
forever. Psalm 23:6*

The Lord took unto himself a dear
husband, father, opa and brother;

WILLIAM (BILL) VEDDER

On January 31, 2007 in his 77th year.

Survived by his loving wife Hilda Vedder

His children:

Mary Ann Bliss, *Welland*,
Peter & Fran Vedder, *Wainfleet*,
John Vedder, *Wainfleet*,
Jane Beaulieu, *Wainfleet*,
Dave & Marisa Vedder-Bergsma,
Wainfleet

His grandchildren:

Faith and Barry Bliss, Ben, Laura,
Emilia Vedder, Michael Vedder,
Tara and Nathan Beaulieu

Also survived by brothers and sisters:

Will De Harder, *Holland*
Jake & June Vedder, *Vineland*
Susan Kiers, *Welland*
Ham & Marcy Vedder, *St. Catharines*
Hank & Jane Vedder, *Fonthill*

Predeceased by his parents

Peter & Jaapje Vedder and
a grandson Jason Vedder

He will be greatly missed by many
other relatives and friends.

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Nov. 25, 1920 Schoonrewoerd, South Holland NL - Jan. 7, 2007 Whitby, Ont. Canada

INGELBERT LIEVAART

*Very truly I tell you,
whoever hears my word
and believes him
who sent me has eternal
life and will not be judged
but has crossed over
from death to life.
John 5:24 TNIV*

On Sunday, Jan. 7th,
the LORD in his mercy
took home our dear
Papa, Opa, & great-Opa
peacefully, in his sleep.

Papa was predeceased by
his treasured wife Betsy,
in 1993, also by brothers
Leen and Dirk.

Papa will be keenly missed by his children, grandchildren, & great-grandchildren:

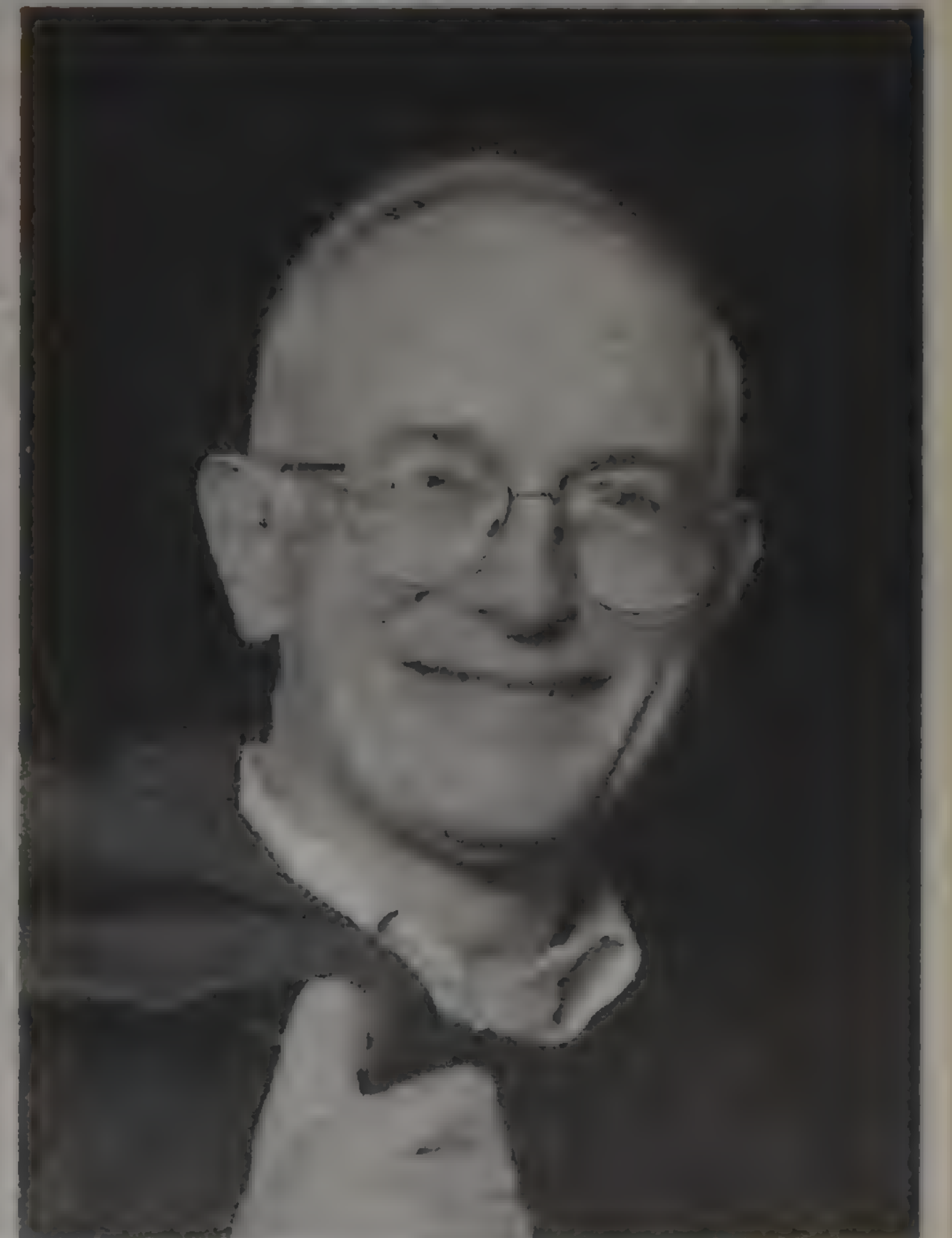
Ellie (Eleanor) & Dennis Fox, *Thunder Bay*
Tracey & Grant McArthur – Spencer, Lochlan, *Montreal*
Luke & Anna Fox – Lev, *Burlington*
Gregory & Annie Fox – Mary-Anne, David, Joel, *Vars*
Jerry & Shelly Fox, *Casselman*
Joey (Johanna) & Andy Buwalda, *Whitby*
Timothy Buwalda, *Bowmanville*
David Buwalda, *Toronto*
Joshua-Dan Buwalda, *White River*
Ingelbert Lievaart II, *London*

Friend Lena Carney-Andrew, Renie, Geraldine

Papa will also be missed by the Moraal families, other relatives & friends.

In Canada, Ingelbert was a member of the Brantford, Albion Rd.
(Rexdale), Rehoboth Fellowship (T.O.), Cephas, (Peterborough) and
Hebron, (Whitby), Ontario CRC churches.

Correspondence: Jerry Buwalda, 205 Byron St N, Whitby ON L1N 4N2



Classifieds / Job Opportunities

Ministry Opportunities

EMMANUEL CHRISTIAN
REFORMED CHURCH, Calgary

**Pastor of
Church Development
and Education**

This position is intended to empower, enable and encourage the development of leaders in Emmanuel CRC who will impact our church community and society as a whole, fulfilling our purpose and vision. To further enquire or to apply for this position, please contact:

Rudy deGroot
3116-49 Street SW,
Calgary AB T3E 3Y3
Phone (403) 242-6587
rudygreta@hotmail.com

Ordained Pastor with emphasis
on Younger Members:

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REFORMED CHURCH**

in Ancaster, Ontario, Canada is seeking a full-time ordained pastor who is able to provide spiritual leadership to youth in a relational ministry setting and also work in cooperation with a Lead Pastor. A job description and a church profile are available upon request or from the church website. (www.ancastercrc.org) For further information please contact the church office at 905-648-2323 or email
ancasterchristianrc@bellnet.ca

**FAITH FELLOWSHIP
CHRISTIAN REFORMED
CHURCH,**

a young, vibrant church in
Fairview, Alberta is seeking a
part-time pastor.

Please contact

David Bosma, Box 183
Fairview Alberta T0H 1L0
Phone 780-835-2236 or email
dbosma@adfreemail.com

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Go to www.chritiancourier.ca



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FULL-TIME CHAPLAIN

Due to the upcoming retirement of our present chaplain in August 2007, we are searching for a full-time chaplain of our home.

Qualifications:

- Ordained as a minister or chaplain in the Christian Reformed Church
- Be able to converse in the Dutch language
- Have ability to provide effective Pastoral Care

Applicants please contact:

Sherri Davis c/o Shalom Manor,
12 Bartlett Ave, Grimsby ON L3M 4N5
ph 905-945-9631 ext.1159 fx 905-945-1211
sdavis@shalommanor.ca

Church Liaison Worker

This is a volunteer position.

THE HOPE CENTRE – a 17 year old Christian outreach in Brampton, is seeking a volunteer Church Liaison worker to work with our team and its coordinator. This will be a challenging position, designed to build a stronger relationship between the Hope Centre and Local Christian Churches. A minimum 10 hours, self directed time, including time with the Board or Coordinator is required each week. The goal of the position is build bridges to the churches, so we can support their efforts and they ours. You will regularly contact all the local churches, develop contacts, keep the churches informed, develop Hope Helpers in the Churches, assist churches with outreach programs we may help them on, and so on and work with the Hope Centre and its staff and volunteers and support our goals. You must become a member (\$15) per year and be a member in good standing of your church and have a pastor' recommendation. You must be able to drive to meetings. Good communications (Written, spoken, computer) are required.

Please submit your application and resume to:

Ralph Masena, Search Committee Member
and **Ed Appleton, Coordinator,**
Hope Centre

Unit 25 A, 160 Main Street South, Brampton ON L6W 2E1
or by email at hope.centre@hotmail.com
or call us at 905-790-2273

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or mail to:

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OTTAWA CHRISTIAN SCHOOL is seeking qualified applicants for a definite opening for a 60% **senior kindergarten position** commencing in September 2007. If you love Christ and his children, have an Ontario Teacher's Certificate, a Christian School Teacher's Certificate or their equivalents and are interested in being part of a dynamic team of educators we look forward to hearing from you.

Please send your resume and a statement of faith to:

Paul Triemstra, Principal, Ottawa Christian School
2191 Benjamin Ave., Ottawa Ontario K2A 1P6

Tel: (613) 722-5836

Fax: (613) 722-0665

Email: paul@ocschool.org

Website: www.ocschool.org

IMMANUEL CHRISTIAN SCHOOL, in Lethbridge, Alberta,

is seeking a **band/choir instructor** beginning in the 2007/2008 school year. The successful candidate will be a committed Christian with a strong background especially in instrumental music. The position will be full-time or part-time, depending on qualifications for music and other subject areas. The music portion of the position will be a maximum of .75 and will include Band in grades 5 through 12. Choir at the junior and senior high level will also be a possibility, as well as a music appreciation class at the grade seven level. Additional courses at the junior or senior high level will be required to make the position full-time.

Interested candidates are encouraged to contact

Ed DeYoung, Principal,
Immanuel Christian High School,
802 – 6th Ave N, Lethbridge AB T1H 0S1
(403)329-4783 edeyoung@immanuelcs.ca

WILLOWDALE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL, TORONTO, ONTARIO

A school striving for academic excellence and promoting a Christ-centred worldview invites applications for 2 maternity leaves and a possible full time teaching position, effective September 2007. Candidates with a CSTC will be given preference. Science and Physical Education expertise will also be appreciated.

Please send resume, including a Philosophy of Education Statement to:

Attn: Ms. Mary Jansen, Principal
Willowdale Christian School
60 Hilda Avenue, North York ON M2M 1V5
P: 416-222-1711 F: 416-222-1939
mjansen@willowdalechristianschool.org

HOUSTON CHRISTIAN SCHOOL invites applications for a possible position in the **lower elementary area** for September 2007. We anticipate 116 students in Gr. K-12 for the next school year, 7 in Gr. K, 6 in Gr. 1 and 10 in Gr. 2, 6 in Gr. 3.

Houston is forestry-based community of about 4000 people. Our students come from mainly four local churches: Baptist, Canadian Reformed, Christian Reformed and Pentecostal.

Please call, fax or e-mail.

Jack VandenBorn, Principal
Phone: 250-845-7736 (school) 250-845-3778 (home)
Fax: 250-845-7738 E-mail hcschool@telus.net

LACOMBE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

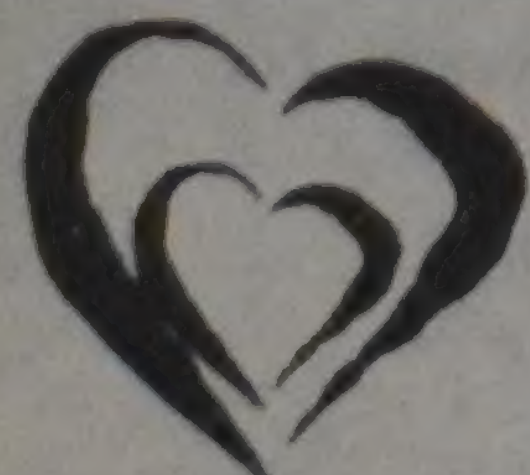
has two possible openings for the 2007-2008 school year:

1. Junior High Social Studies and Language Arts
2. Elementary teacher (grade to be determined)

Applicants should preferably be graduates of a Christian college and/or have teaching experience in a Christian school. L.C.S. is an interdenominational school K-9 with an enrolment of 407 students. Applicants should also have a commitment for a reformed world and life view of Christian education. The ability and interest in coaching an extracurricular sport would be an asset.

Please send resumes to:

Martin Folkerts, Principal
Lacombe Christian School
5206 - 58 Street, Lacombe AB T4L 109
PH: 403-782-6531; FAX: 403-782-5760 or email: mfolkerts@lacs.ca



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Andre Knevel.

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at 7:30 p.m.

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Church

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A free-will offering will be
collected to support the work of
Niagara Life Centre.

See page 22 for more education job positions

Job Opportunities/Advertising



Victoria, B.C.

Director of Operations

PACIFIC CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

As part of the senior management team for Pacific Christian School, the Director of Operations must have:

- Excellent finance/business/accounting knowledge and related experience
- Good Managerial abilities and experience with the capability of managing a busy workload
- Proven experience and skills in
 - budgeting
 - policy analysis/development, and
 - financial reporting/analysis.

As part of our senior management team, the Director of Operations will:

- Be a committed Christian
- Take the key leadership role in the stewardship of our financial resources
- Manage all non-academic administrative functions
- Maintain compliance with Board and Government and legal policies.

Maximum salary for the position is currently \$84,000 per annum, based on the 2006/07 PCS administrative salary grid.

Salary Grid commencing Sept. 07 is currently under review.

To view a full job description, visit:
www.pacificchristian.ca

Forward resume, covering letter and pastor's reference to:
Frank Low, Search Committee Chair at frank.low@rbc.com
Applications will be received until March 16, 2007

*Date duties will commence is negotiable

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Dordt College invites applications and nominations for the position of Vice President for Student Services. Serving on the president's cabinet, the VPSS provides leadership for all Student Services' staff and programs of the college. Areas of responsibility include promoting services for students in areas such as student housing, food service, student activities, residence life, spiritual activities, career services, counseling services and student publications as well as encouraging the total development of all students. The VPSS will also supervise the security staff, attend to health and safety concerns of students, implement the student conduct policy, represent the Student Services Division with other college agencies and the community and serve on various administrative and student-related committees.

Effective communication and interpersonal skills which enhance team work are necessary. A graduate degree is required and experience in higher education and administration or a similar setting is desired. Candidates with a graduate degree in an appropriate field are preferred.

Enthusiastic Christians with a commitment to the Reformed faith and the desire to help lead a dynamic and growing institution are invited to send a letter of application and resume to the Director of Human Resources at the address below. Review of applications will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled.

Dordt College

498 Fourth Ave. NE

Sioux Center, IA 51250

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Feb 4 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching.

Apr 7 The Liberation Choir Fundraising Dinner will take place at 5.30 – 7 pm in Studio Theatre/Convention Centre at Hamilton Place with Micheal Coren as guest speaker. Included in this ticket price of \$ 200 is: prime seating at the concert and a Dinner Reservation. A \$ 100 tax receipt will be issued by Worldwide Christian Schools. Tickets available at Pianohouse Burlington, Worldwide Christian Schools, or Tjitske @ 905 520 0207

Apr 7 The Liberation Choir Burlington/Brampton Chapters perform in the **EASTER CONCERT** with Guelph Symphony Orchestra (Simon Irving, conductor) and a Combined Children's Choir (Elizabeth Webster, conductor) and Jennifer McMahon, soprano soloist. Director: Willem Van Suijdam @ 7.30 pm, **GREAT HALL, HAMILTON PLACE, HAMILTON ON**. Ticket prices: \$40 \$33 \$25. Tickets available at: Hamilton Place Box office, Ticket master, Choir members, River Run Centre in Guelph, Selected Dutch Stores and at the Pianohouse Burlington, 5205 Harvester Road, Burlington. www.liberationchoir.com

Mar 2 Niagara Life Centre presents The Niagara Peninsula Orchestra, 7:30 p.m. at Covenant CRC, **St. Catharines**. See ad this issue.

Mar 2 & 3 Woodstock Dutch Theatre Groep - "Ik Voel Nattingheid" - Market Centre Theatre, 22 Reeve St, **Woodstock**, Ont. 8 p.m. Phone 519-283-6285 for more information or see ad, Feb. 5 issue.

Mar 9 & 10 Woodstock Dutch Theatre Groep - "Ik Voel Nattingheid" - Market Centre Theatre, **Woodstock**, Ont. 8 p.m. See ad Feb 5 issue for details or call 519-283-6285.

Mar 30 Woodstock Dutch Theatre Groep - "Ik Voel Nattingheid" Christian Heritage School, **Jordan Station**, Ont. See ad Feb 5 issue for details or call 519-283-6285.

THE BACK TO GOD HOUR



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3475 Mainway PO Box 5070 Stn LCD1 Burlington ON L7R 3Y8 Web: www.backtogod.net/

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Burns Lake – CFLD 9:15 am 1400
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Prince George – CIRX..... 7:00 am 94.3
Princeton – CHOR..... 8:00 am 1400
Smithers – CFBV..... 9:15 am 1230
Vernon – CJIB 9:30 pm..... 94

ALBERTA

Brooks – CIBQ 8:30 am 1340
Edmonton – CJCA..... 6:00 pm..... 930

MANITOBA

Winnipeg – CKJS 9:00 am 810

ONTARIO

Atikokan – CFAK 9:30 am 1240
Chatham – CFCO 6:30 am 630
Hamilton – CHAM 7:30 am 820
London – CKSL..... 7:00 am 1410
Owen Sound – CFOS .. 7:00 am 560
Sarnia – CHOK..... 7:30 am 1070
Stratford – CJCS..... 8:45 am 1240
Wingham – CKNX 10:30 am 920
Woodstock – CJFH..... 7:30 am 94.03

NEW BRUNSWICK

Saint John – CHSJ 9:00 am 94.1

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Charlottetown – CFCY . 7:00 am 630

NOVA SCOTIA

Digby – CKDY 6:00 am 1420
Halifax – CFDR..... 8:30 am 780
Liverpool – CKBW 7:30 am 94.5
Kentville – CKEN 8:30 am 1490
Middleton – CKAD 8:30 am 1350

Shelburne – CKBW 7:30 am 93.1
Sydney – CJCB..... 7:00 am 1270
Weymouth – CKDY..... 8:30 am 103.1
Windsor – CFAB 8:30 am 1450

TELEVISION - PRIMARY FOCUS

AB Lethbridge – CJIL Thurs at 9 pm.

BC- OMNI - Sunday 4 pm

TBN (Trinity Broadcasting Network)

Kids Corner
Radio

ALBERTA

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High River/Calgary CHRB 1140 AM..Sun. 4:30pm
Nordegg CHBW 93.9 FM..... Sun. 8:30 am
Rocky Mtn.House CHBW 94.5 FM. Sun. 8:30 am

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Prince Rupert CIAJ 100.7 FM Sat. 10 am

MANITOBA

Steinbach CHSM 1250 AMSun. 4 pm

NOVA SCOTIA

Bridgewater CKBW 1000 AMSun. 5:30 am

ONTARIO

Oshawa CKDO 1350 AM Sat. 8 am
Woodstock CJFH 94.3 FM Sat. 8 am

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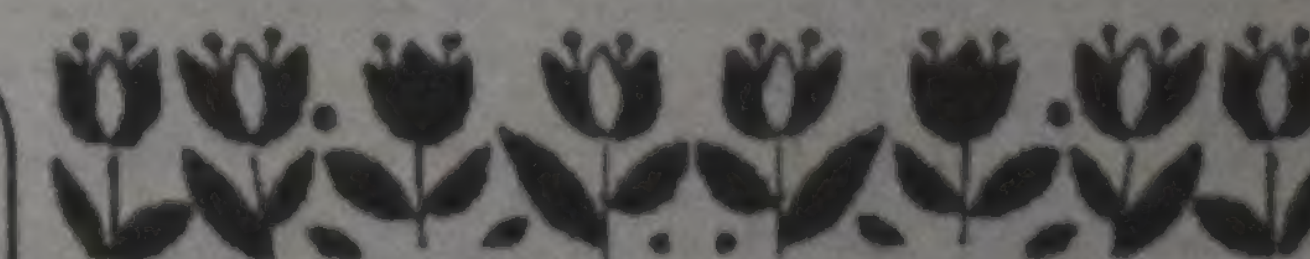
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News

Solidarnotes: join in the search for new perspectives on the social question



The Christian Labour Association of Canada is launching a new Website called Solidarnotes. It is associated with their network of Solidarity

Locals. Below we have the challenge that the CLAC puts before us, a challenge rooted in a long history that has engaged Christians of many different persuasions.

There are 33 Solidarity Locals of the CLAC across the country eager for more members. Members pay dues to the CLAC even though they are not party to any collective agreement. They sign up to support the idea of a Christian union that strives for justice, peace and cooperation in the workplace – here and elsewhere. Most of all, they sign up to pass on this vision of a different kind of labour, a different kind of union to upcoming generations.

See <http://www.clac.ca/information/solidarity/>

Rags, riches and questions to boot

Here's a problem: an industrial economy grows at a blistering pace producing incredible wealth. At the same time, a growing population of impoverished people – most of whom are workers – lives in squalid conditions complete with major social unrest. Solve.

That was the social question of the day in nineteenth century Europe. It was a question which everyone – from the squatters on the street, to prime ministers and preachers – faced.

The attempts to answer the social question multiplied almost as rapidly as cholera in the big cities. And, while the various responses are too diverse to cover in e-bulletin

format, three schools have been the most influential. One in particular profoundly shapes the work of CLAC today.

I need answers!

Those in the liberal school suggested that markets, if left alone, would solve the problems plaguing Europe. "Let it be" they said, "the problem will take care of itself." For the liberals, labour was simply another commodity, and increased demands for labour would raise wages and take care of the poverty and unrest.

The socialist response offered a different diagnosis of the problem. The problem, they suggested, arises from an oppressive capitalist class who exploited the working class and enjoyed the fruits of their hard labour. The solution? Revolution.

It's important to note that both liberalism

and socialism claimed to have science on their side. Both suggested that their diagnosis of the problem, and their solution, were scientifically verifiable.

The response to the social question among Christians was mixed. Some thought that socialism was in line with the Christian call to protect the poor and thus joined those clamouring for revolutionary change. Others sided with the status quo, or pushed for deeper integration of Christianity with liberal economics.

However, a Christian response eventually matured and emerged as a unique response to the social question.

In the next couple of issues, we'll explore how Protestant and Catholic Christian social thought and action emerged to seek both justice for the oppressed and the wealth of nations.

LIBERATION CHOIR

EASTER CONCERT

Guelph Symphony Orchestra

Combined Children's Choir

Saturday, April 7, 2007

at 7:30 pm.

Great Hall, Hamilton Place

Director in charge of the Evening
Willem van Suijdam

Director in charge of
Guelph Symphony Orchestra
Simon Irving

Director in charge of Combined Children's Choir
Elizabeth Webster

Soprano Soloist
Jennifer McMahon



Conductor
Willem van Suijdam



Master of Ceremonies
Michael Coren

Ticket prices: \$40. - \$33. - \$25.

Tickets are available from: Hamilton Place Box Office, Ticket Master, Liberation Choir Members, selected Dutch Stores and at PianoHouse Burlington, 5205 Harvester Road, Burlington.

News briefs

CEO foxes

Repeat after me: "High CEO salaries are an outrage!" Recently the CEO of Home Depot departed with a \$210 million handshake. Not all in cash, of course. He didn't have enough briefcases. United Health Group CEO received \$124.8 million in compensation in 2005. That would buy a lot of macaroni and cheese.

A few years ago the U.S. tried putting a cap on CEO salaries, but the corporations found other ways to sweeten the pot – stock options, pensions, etc. (No, they're not handing out "Get out of jail free" cards.) Turns out, that CEO packages increased in value.

Unintended consequences. So the regulators stipulated that CEO salaries and benefits had to be made public. Knowledge is power, after all. But it did not empower the shareholders and employees. It triggered another round of competition among CEOs for the prestige of sitting on the biggest pay package (no allusion to pants size intended).

Turns out in many big corporations the CEO is also chairman of the board that decides on the salary.

One is tempted to suggest that perhaps this is not a good practice – a bit like putting the fox in charge of the henhouse. Maybe that's a poor analogy: we wouldn't want to suggest that the boards are chicken.

Minimum wage and equality

Minimum wage. My mailbox has been brimming with e-mails from various church bodies and Christian activist groups demanding a higher minimum wage. In the U.S. supporters want it raised to \$10 per hour. That's still only

about \$20,000 per year. Can you live off that in New York city or Los Angeles? I'm not sure you could survive on that in Doon, Iowa – unless someone rented you a room in the basement.

So is a call for a minimum wage of \$10 per hour a call for justice?

Inequality. Some Christian groups have mailed out statements declaring that God hates inequality.

Does that mean everyone should be getting the same pay as CEOs?

What about those poor shmucks who made my \$70 shoes? They're probably doing well if they get \$2 per day. Should we only buy shoes made by those who earn at least \$10 per hour?

Then tens of thousands of workers in poor countries would lose their jobs.

Recently hundreds of people in a region of Pakistan who sewed soccer balls for Nike lost their jobs because activists discovered that here and there the work was still being done by children. Justice triumphant?

Peg the minimum wage too high here and, free market advocates argue, there will be fewer jobs for those on the bottom of the pay scale. My wife and I may no longer be able to stop at Wendy's for a baked potato and chili. I'd hate that.

But I hate inequality too. When I look at the pay of CEOs I especially hate inequality. When I look at the pay of ball stitchers in Pakistan, however, I'm glad I don't get a pay rate equal to theirs.

Of course, then your subscription to *Christian Courier* could be cut by \$10 per year and you could have an extra lunch at Tim Horton's on me.